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Kristin Hiykel

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Behavior Management Practices and School Workers' Perceptions:

What We Believe, How We Act, and Why

A DISSERTATION SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE  
COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, LEADERSHIP AND COUNSELING OF THE UNIVERSITY  
OF ST. THOMAS

ST. PAUL, MINNESOTA

By

Kristin M. Hiykel

IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS

FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

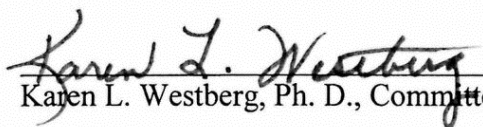
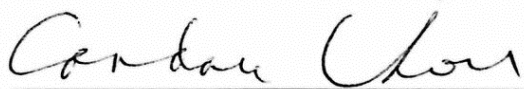
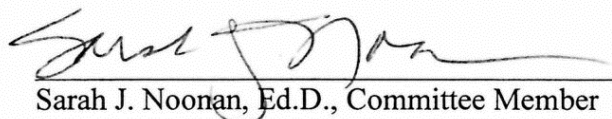
2017

## UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS, MINNESOTA

Behavior Management Practices and School Workers' Perceptions:  
What We Believe, How We Act, and Why

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

## Dissertation Committee

  
Karen L. Westberg, Ph. D., Committee Chair  
Candace Chien-Tzu, Ph. D., Committee Member  
Sarah J. Noonan, Ed.D., Committee Member20 December 2016

Final Approval Date

## Abstract

Behavior management is an area of concern for school personnel that can have a strong influence on student achievement. How do teachers, administrators and other school personnel perceive and manage student behavior in a highly diverse single urban elementary school with a lower than average rate of student achievement in reading and mathematics? The purpose of this study was to (a) obtain data about what staff do in terms of behavior management, and (b) explore staff perceptions of behavior management related issues that include student home life, student culture, teacher personality, perceptions of colleagues, perceptions of one's own practices, and effective methods for improvement.

The methodology for this study was a bounded case study of one elementary school during one school year. All staff were invited to participate in a survey, and a purposeful sample of participants was invited to participate in qualitative interviews. The analyzed data indicated that staff (a) use components of behavior management school reform initiatives but are not fully implementing programs, (b) were concerned about a lack of consistency, (c) believe teacher-student relationships and establishing clear expectations are important steps, (d) believe they are the biggest influence of student behavior, and (e) preferred proactive measures and conferencing over consequences for misbehavior. Many participants tended to attribute student misbehavior to factors outside of the students' control, and thus may not hold students accountable for their behavior and may not consistently expect student to follow expectations. High behavior management expectations of all students may improve student behavior at this setting. Improved staff consistency in already established behavior management protocols and implementation of school improvement initiatives may also be effective. Because there may be a strong correlation

between behavior management and academic achievement, improving behavior management may improve student academic performance at this site.

## Acknowledgements

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The work I have done towards this degree and dissertation would not have been possible without the support of my family. First, I thank Edward and my mother, Barbara. The encouragement from both of you was invaluable. It is a blessing to have people, such as you, who always believe in me. To my children, Carolyn and James: every word I wrote with thought of you present. Every day of work or time spent writing is done for you.

Finally, I acknowledge my father, the late Mark S. Anderson. I received a love of research and an excitement for learning from him. He taught me to have high standards, and he taught me the power of the written word.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction

### Story One: Teacher Perception

It was 2:25 and Mrs. C's class of intermediate elementary school students was coming down the hall for music. I stood in the doorway, watching them approach. Mrs. C. was at the back, talking to two students as the rest made their way down the hallway. I saw four children running. Two girls stopped by the health office and had what looked like a couple of unpleasant words with one another, just as the nurse was trying to exit. One boy jumped up and tried to touch the sign hanging from the ceiling that designated the boy's bathroom. He was tall enough to reach it, and the sign waved back and forth in the air.

As the line got closer to my classroom—and I use the term “line” very loosely, because it was more accurately a clump—I could tell how noisy they were. At least half the class was talking. A kindergarten class waited in lines outside my room after using the bathroom. The kindergarten teacher leaned over to me and very passive aggressively stated, “It would be nice if my students could hear me.” A substitute teacher passed by with a group of second graders, and the teachers and students watched the older students who were now entering the music room.

They entered my classroom with a lot of energy and spirit. I told them to stand on their assigned spots, hoping the routine would settle them. The principal and the assistant principal walked by, and I hoped they were not blaming the noise on me.

As the intermediate teacher got to my classroom door, she said a couple of last words to the students she had been talking to, and then she turned to me with what was almost a smile on her tired face: “It's been a pretty good day.”

Every adult who observed that particular class as they came down the hall had potentially different perceptions of the behaviors witnessed. The nurse, kindergarten teacher, substitute,

administrators, their intermediate classroom teacher, and I each saw different things based upon our experience, personal beliefs, and knowledge of that class and the school. The nurse had an opportunity to hear what the two girls had actually talked about, and she knew how she might have dealt with that situation. She commented later that she would have talked with them if she had time. The kindergarten teacher remembered many of the children from when they were in her class, and she bemoaned the loss of all her hard work with these students. The substitute teacher commented later in the faculty lounge that adults at the elementary school across town would never have allowed that behavior. The administrators later chatted about supports they could provide this teacher, but they were glad to see the teacher had separated two boys who had fought last week. During my music class with that group, I wished I were currently teaching one of the easier to manage sections of this grade. The classroom teacher of this group, meanwhile, began her 30 minutes of work time, and was excited because that particular day she did not need to use her work time to escort a student to the office, or fill out paperwork for multiple office referrals. No one had gotten into any major verbal or physical fights that day, so her work time was hers for lesson planning.

The story above is fictional, but representative of interactions I have experienced many times at the site of this study. Similar events occurred multiple times a week. The story below is a non-fictional account of differing perceptions that occurred at this site. I was in a position to hear and see two varying perceptions of teacher expectations for students and student behavior.

### **Story Two: Teacher Perceptions of Themselves and Colleagues**

One week in the middle of the school year, my administrators assigned several of us to conduct peer review observations. They asked me to observe several primary grade classrooms during language arts times. After I scheduled observation times with each teacher and made

arrangements for my own class coverage, two teachers I was to observe approached me separately in the hallway. Both gave away some nervousness. Peer observations were not common in the school at this time. I assured them we were just looking at a few elements of instruction and management during our time with them, and that I was excited to spend time in their rooms.

What I saw during the observations were two very different classroom settings. In one room, the teacher was leading group instruction in the front of the room by the Smart Board. Students had assigned carpet spots, and sat neatly in rows. They raised their hands before they spoke. No child got up from assigned seats. When it was time for students to move to their chairs, they carefully walked immediately to their desks and started work. The room was quiet, except for the teacher's voice or the voice of a child who raised a hand before speaking.

I observed the other teacher during independent or group work time. I was not able to identify if the children were to be working by themselves or with other students at their desk groups. I am not sure all the students knew, either. The teacher moved around the room and worked with individuals or small groups. Most of the students were engaged in an academic task, but a few were not. One student had a small meltdown, but this did not disrupt the work of other children.

Later in the week, both teachers approached me again in the hallway. The first teacher, with the perfect rows and the quiet children, exclaimed how terribly the lesson had gone during her observation. She reminded me that two children had quietly spoken without raising their hands. This teacher had corrected them warmly and quickly, and the students fixed their mistakes. There had been no significant loss of instructional time. The second teacher, in

contrast, walked by me and said with a big grin, “The lesson actually went really well!” She seemed surprised and pleased.

The summations of observations by those two teachers fixed for me the concept that different adults working in a school setting may have drastically divergent perceptions on behavior management. With the first teacher, I saw a highly controlled, orderly, and focused class. The teacher saw students not following expectations. With the second teacher, I saw a loose classroom atmosphere. I imagined the first teacher would not have felt the student actions in that classroom were acceptable. Yet, their teacher saw most students on task and felt the work time went very well.

Sometimes perceptions vary because as adults in a classroom, we may not notice everything. One adult in a classroom will not see every student action and interaction throughout a typical day. The second teacher may not have noticed students off task. I may not have noticed students in the first classroom not following expectations. The contrast in different perceptions, however, is not just a result of awareness of everything happening in a classroom. It is also a matter of personal tolerance by staff for noise, difference in priorities in learning and behavior management, and differences in compositions of student populations from classroom to classroom.

In the following, I will first describe the background of this study. Next, I explain the central problem and purpose of the study. I explain the research question and potential significance, followed by the analytical framework.

### **Background of the Study**

Behavior management is a constant, persistent problem for educators (Aud et al., 2012; Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2016). School personnel may have very different

perceptions of student behavior, and different philosophies on how to manage behavior effectively. Disruptive student behavior may negatively affect student academic learning time (Stough & Emmer, 2001; Gilpatrick, 2010; Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-David, & Hunt, 2011). These disruptions and loss of academic time may cause lower academic achievement (Dolan et al., 1993; Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-David, & Hunt, 2011). There are many reform programs and initiatives that schools can choose from to address behavior and academic issues. The school I chose as the site of this study used four main school improvement programs: Responsive Classroom, arts integration strategies, culturally responsive teaching, and *School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (SWPBIS). Reform initiatives may be ineffective due to issues related to teacher perception, such as buy-in, implementation, and other factors (Blahus, 2013; Bradshaw, Debnam, & Pas, 2012; Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, & Rimm-Kaufman, 2008; Charland, 2011; Coffrey & Horner, 2012; Flannery, Sugai, & Anderson, 2009; Horsch, Chen, & Wagner, 2002; LaJevic, 2013; Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014; Simonsen, Sugai, & Negron, 2008).

By evaluating the perceptions of student behavior and staff behavior management as expressed by adults in different roles, educators may recognize the subjectivity of classroom management. “Beliefs play a critical role in shaping teaching practices because there is a lack of consensus about best practice based on objective evidence” (Snider & Roehl, 2007, p. 873). Multiple perspectives and multiple versions of the truth perhaps exist for any given school interaction. There has been some research during the last 15 years on the varying perceptions of adults working in a school system (Chan & King, 2011; Gilpatrick, 2010; Harrison, Vannest, Davis, & Reynolds, 2012; Irwin, Anamuah-Mensah, Aboagye, & Addison, 2004; Irwin & Nucci, 2004; Kulinna, 2008; McCauliffe, Hubbard, & Romano, 2009; McCready & Soloway,



2010; Rhodes, 2010; Simmons, 2010; Snider & Roehl, 2007; Stormont, Reinke, & Herman, 2011; Thompson, 2010; Tillery, Varjas, Meyers, & Collins, 2010; Ward, 2009), although there are limitations (sampling, internal and external validity concerns, etc.) in many of these studies. The purpose of this case study is to identify educator perceptions of student behaviors and staff behavior management actions that may serve to inform the behavior management practices they implement.

### **Statement of the Problem and Purpose of the Study**

Behavior management interferes with academic achievement (Dolan et al., 1993; Emmer & Stough, 2001; & Ratcliff, Jones, Costner, Savage-David, & Hunt), and school staff may not have the same perceptions as to the nature of the problem nor how to address the problem effectively. In this study, I looked at perceptions and actions of adults regarding student behavior, as a part of a high poverty urban school using several school improvement initiatives. The purpose of this study was to describe the perceptions and actions of different adults in a school setting with regard to behavior management.

Through this research, I discovered staff held various views of specific situations. Participants identified best practices for behavior management at this setting. The data collected through the survey and qualitative interviews provided information about how and why adults manage student behaviors the way they do.

### **Research Question, Method, and Significance**

The central research question that guided this study was: how do teachers, administrators, and other school personnel perceive and manage student behavior in a highly diverse single urban elementary school with a lower than average rate of student achievement in reading and mathematics? With this case study, I used a mixed-methods approach. I surveyed staff at this site

regarding their use of behavior management practices. I used an internet-based survey program to gather information about their use of behavior management interventions and SWPBIS. I then conducted qualitative in-depth interviews with 15 school personnel. I used a semi-structured interview format, and selected participants with a variety of experience, educational backgrounds, ethnicities, and job positions.

This study fills a gap in prior research because past studies of school personnel have only focused on teachers' perceptions and have ignored the viewpoints of other school staff. This study adds to the body of research by including the voices of administrators, paraprofessionals, program assistants, special services staff, and teachers of specialist areas. This might include music, physical education, art, and media staff.

Within this case study, I have described the perceptions and actions of staff at an urban elementary school with a high level of poverty and students with below average levels of achievement in math and reading. The school, the district, and the state all have an achievement gap between White students and Black students, as well as a disproportionate number of Black students given office referrals (MDE, 2016). This study examines behavior management at this site, which may have implications for elementary schools with similar demographics or problems.

### **Analytical Framework**

This research is a mixed methods study, using constructivism as the framework for the design of the study. With constructivism, one tries to do more than just explain phenomena—one tries to understand it. People create knowledge through social interaction, and for this reason, this framework is also known as social constructivism (Rohmann, 1999). Many consider

constructivism a more appropriate paradigm for the social sciences than a tradition such as positivism, for example (Givens, 2008).

With positivism, people gain knowledge of the world objectively through the scientific methods of observation and experimentation. Positivism was termed by Saint-Simon, and his student Comte developed it further and made it popular (Rohmann, 1999). Constructivism was born out of an anti-positivist movement in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The writings of Wilhem Dilthey, Edmund Husserl and Max Weber were central to this movement. These thinkers believed there was a need for a science that would explore the world created by mankind, including social institutions, language, culture, and beliefs—as well as the meaning humans place on these aspects of the world (Givens, 2008).

This research was grounded in constructivism in that it explored the social institution that is United States elementary schools, as well as the human created culture and beliefs regarding student behavior that are a part of school. This study was primarily concerned with the perceptions adults ascribe to student behavior, and their own resulting actions. Thus, a research design of positivism in which I would merely observe behaviors is insufficient for this study.

I most closely utilized Wilhem Dilthey's concept of constructivism (Givens, 2008). According to Dilthey, meaning is uncovered through a process of understanding entitled "verstehen." Verstehen is knowledge created through the exchange between researcher and participant (Givens, 2008).

One of Dilthey's main contributions to the field of constructivism involved the belief that researchers should study humans systematically and empirically in the context of their society and culture. This research used questionnaires and qualitative interviews in order to create meaning. I conducted this research in the context of an elementary school that uses a number of

school improvement initiatives, and focuses most prominently on one specific behavior management system, SWPBIS. I considered the finding in light of the setting of this particular school, which is a high poverty, urban school that is a part of a larger district. As Dilthey asserted, the context of the research is highly important (Givens, 2008).

Dilthey stated that there was an order to human life, and that this order developed through interactions with the larger world. Human constructions such as myths or art are evidence of these interactions with the larger world. Humans, because of their experiences, construct beliefs that manifest into actions (Givens, 2008). Adults working in a school setting have all experienced rules for student behavior differently throughout their lives. Because of this, they create their own set of beliefs to explain student actions. These beliefs may or may not manifest into positive or negative actions towards students. Prior experiences may have an effect on how one handles behavior management in the school setting.

This research will also follow Dilthey's view of constructivism, in that constructivism is not synonymous with relativism. Although people create meaning through the interactions between researcher and participant, Dilthey was concerned that it not be merely relativism. In Dilthey's view of constructivism, findings have some transferability to other similar contexts (Givens, 2008). My aim with this research was that the findings might have some implications for other similar school settings and not just illuminate issues at one elementary school.

In this research, I also utilized Husserl's contributions to the field of constructivism. Husserl expanded upon constructivism through his development of phenomenology. Phenomenology is the study of a situation or phenomenon through reflection (Givens, 2008). Husserl believed one needed to put aside all normal assumptions in order to examine experiences from an unbiased perspective (Rohmann, 1999). Although my research study is not strictly

phenomenological, it does contain some elements of this qualitative research method. Husserl's view of phenomenology involves an individual reflecting upon an experience and describing the experience. What is essential to phenomenology is that the individual, through reflection, comes to a realization about what is essential or important about the experience. Husserl named this process as "anschauung", or the realization of new knowledge (Givens, 2008).

"Anschauung" is a typical goal of qualitative research using interviews (Givens, 2008). One of the two data-gathering methods of my research was qualitative interviews. It was a goal that those I interviewed will reflect upon their experiences with behavior management. Thus, the participants and I will bring to light new knowledge about this topic.

### **Summary**

There is a lack of relevant research regarding the beliefs and actions of adults working in a school system in regards to behavior management. In this study, I looked at the various ways different adults in a building approached behavior management and I looked for patterns in practices and beliefs. I collected and analyzed staff perceptions of their own actions and their colleague's actions. I identified staff perceptions of students and beliefs about sources of misbehavior. I also discovered their preferred methods of managing student behavior.

I theorized that low student achievement, student confusion, and adult confusion regarding best behavior management practices was caused by differing perceptions, experiences, and philosophies among adults in the school setting. I discovered that adults working in this setting did have contrasting viewpoints, but that they also had many commonalities in their beliefs and practices.

In the next chapter, I describe relevant research on behavior management and teachers' perceptions of student behavior. In Chapter 3, I provide detail on my research design and

rationale, my role as researcher, research setting, methodology, and trustworthiness. Chapter 4 contains the results from the survey and the qualitative in-depth interviews. In Chapter 5, I provide an analysis of the results, give recommendations, describe limitations of the study, and give suggestions for future research.

## **Definition of Terms**

**Art integration** -- an approach to teaching in which students demonstrate understanding in a traditional subject area through an art form

**At-risk students** – students or groups of students considered to have a higher likelihood of failing academically or dropping out of school

**Code-switching** – a process by which the adult in the classroom helps students understand in a judgment free manner that there may be one way to behave or speak at home, and a different set of expectations as to how to behave or speak at school

**Critical race theory** – a theoretical framework focused on the critical examination of society and culture and their intersections with race, law, and power

**Culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy (CLR)** – teaching strategies which validate the home culture and language of students and form bridges from the students' cultures to academic settings and mainstream culture

**Culturally responsive teaching** -- a pedagogy that stresses in all components of learning the importance of students' culture

**Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD)** – a disability classification that allows schools to provide special education services to students who have poor social or academic adjustment that cannot be explained by another disability

**English Learners (EL)** – students learning English and may benefit from English language services in the school setting

**Free or reduced price lunch** – students with families making under specific income levels can qualify for free or reduced price meals at school

**Individualized Education Program (IEP) and 504 Plans** –an IEP is a written statement of an educational program designed to meet a child's individual needs, which every student in special education is required to have. A 504 plan is a plan for how a student will have access to learning in school, and students might qualify for a 504 plan if they do not qualify for special education

**Intermediate Teachers** – teachers who teach older elementary grade levels, approximately second or third grade through sixth grade

**National Urban Alliance (NUA)** -- an organization that provides professional development, advocacy, and guidance in best practice and culturally responsive teaching to urban and suburban schools

**No Child Left Behind** – signed into national law in 2002, recent updates to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965

**Primary Teachers** – teachers who teach younger elementary grade levels, approximately kindergarten through second or third grades

**Professional Learning Communities (PLC)** -- a group of educators who meet regularly to share student performance data and suggestions for best practice in order to improve teaching skills and student achievement

**Q Comp** – alternative teacher compensation program that provides incentives to teachers who meet specific high quality standards

**Responsive Classroom** – a school improvement program that focuses on the connection between academic achievement and social-emotional learning

**School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)** – a school improvement program which aims to reduce behavior problems through positive incentives and a three-tiered approach to interventions



## Chapter 2: Review of Literature

In this literature review, I describe research on behavior management and teachers' perceptions of student behavior. In the first section of this paper, I explore the main issues with regard to behavior management in United States schools. Then, I discuss commonly used research-based methods of behavior management in schools, which the school in this study also uses. These include Responsive Classroom, art integration strategies, culturally responsive teaching, and School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS).

In the second section of this chapter, I review current research on teachers' perceptions of student behavior. Teachers' perceptions of student behavior can complement or hinder any type of behavior management system used in schools (Chan & King, 2011; Tillery et al., 2010). Out of this research, I discuss several main themes, including types of negative behaviors teachers perceive, the importance of student-teacher relationships, effects of reform initiatives, philosophies regarding causes of negative behaviors, and teachers' perceptions of strategies for responding to problem behaviors.

I found the research studies cited in this study using the ERIC database and searching for relevant articles, dissertations and books. I used the following key words and combinations of these words in this search: "teacher perspectives," "teacher perspectives of behavior," "teacher perceptions," "perceptions of behavior," "behavior management," "discipline," "School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS)," "teacher support," "teacher improvement," "classroom environment," "reward," "locus of control," "enabling," "school improvement," "school reform," "high poverty schools," "academic achievement," "teacher effectiveness," "teacher behavior," "strict," "non-compliance," "time on task," "talking," "teacher personality," "teaching styles," "teaching characteristics," "home life," "consistency,"

“emotional behavior management,” “culture,” “colleagues,” “generations,” “judgment,” “teach-student relationship,” “consistency,” “arts integration strategies,” “Responsive Classroom,” “culturally responsive teaching,” “code switching,” “differentiation,” “problem behaviors,” and “consequences.”

### **Behavior Management Issues and Methods**

Some in education may refer to this topic as “discipline,” but I use the term “behavior management” to refer to all student-teacher interactions. Maag (2004), among others, argued behavior management is not just doling out rewards or exacting punishments, but is a system requiring educators to analyze behaviors, make decisions about what needs to change, provide reinforcement, and monitor success.

### **Student Behavior Problems in United States and Study Location**

Behavior management is an important topic to explore because despite the depth of educational research on this topic, there has not been a noticeable improvement in this area (Aud et al., 2012). For example, 85% of all United States public schools reported one or more incidents of violence during the school year. Violent incidents include physical attacks or threats of physical attack, plus more serious violent incidents such as robbery, rape, battery, and attacks with a weapon (Aud et al., 2012). Of the 85% of schools that had violent acts of some level, 29% recorded 3-9 incidents a year, 18% recorded 10-19 incidents, and 19% recorded 20 or more incidents. The higher the level of poverty of the school, the more likely the school was to have violent incidents occur, although the National Center for Educational Statistics does not state causality. City schools were also more likely to have violent incidents, compared to schools in rural or suburban locations (Aud et al., 2012). This failure has the potential to affect both the safety of individuals as well as student achievement levels.

During the 2014-2015 school year in the state I conducted my study, there were a total of 46,442 suspensions or expulsions. This included the following incidents: 708 reported incidents of bullying, 6,998 fights, 50 reported gang activities, 3,869 assaults, 1,966 verbal abuses, 1,311 harassments, 289 terrorist threats, 1,287 weapons, 16,861 disruptive/disorderly conduct incidents, and 2,646 threats/intimidations (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2016).

During the same year, the school district in which my study site resided had 58 assaults, 265 disruptive disorderly conduct incidents, 353 fights, and 86 threats/intimidations. There were a total of 1,029 suspensions and expulsions in this school district, and there were approximately 12,500 students in this school district (MDE, 2016).

The rate of suspensions and expulsions subdivided by race is noteworthy in this state. In 2014- 2015, White students were 69.6 % of the population, and 37% of the reported disciplinary actions. Black students were 10% of the student population and 38% of the reported disciplinary actions (MDE, 2016).

In 2013, 5<sup>th</sup> grade students in this district took a survey about their experiences at school. One question asked was, “How often do you pay attention in class?” Twenty-nine percent of fifth graders in this district answered “all of the time”, 56% said “most of the time”, 14% said “some of the time”, and 1% said “none of the time.” Additionally, 8% of fifth grade students in the district disagreed or strongly disagreed that they felt safe at school (MDE, 2016).

### **Relationship between Behavior Management and Student Achievement**

There is an inextricable link between behavior management and student achievement (Dolan et al., 1993; Emmer & Stough, 2001; & Ratcliff, 2011). According to Marzano (2007), three elements comprise effective teaching and, thus, high student achievement: the effective use of instructional methods, effective design of curriculum, and effective behavior management

strategies. Dolan et al. (1993) investigated the achievement-management link and found that disruptive students were less engaged in academics, were more likely to have lower grades, and did not do as well on standardized tests as their peers in well-managed settings. With a sample of 864 first grade students in 19 Baltimore schools with similar populations, Dolan et al. used two different intervention strategies to attempt to reduce risk behaviors in the classroom and then determined the impact of these strategies as measured by teacher and student ratings of effectiveness. The researchers divided the 19 schools into five different urban areas. They randomly assigned three or four schools in each of the five groups one of the different intervention strategies, or as a control group. The use of both teacher and student feedback helped to validate Dolan et al.'s results, but the results could have been further substantiated had another adult, other than the teacher, rated students. The researchers had some internal validity in this study, however, by using a control group that did not receive any treatment (Dolan et al., 1993).

A more recent study analyzed the actual rate of on-task behavior in various teachers' classrooms (Ratcliff et al., 2011). These researchers compared teachers considered by administrators as competent in instruction and management to teachers considered ineffective in these areas. The researchers found that on average, 90% of students in the ineffective teachers' classrooms were on-task only 30% of the time. Comparatively, in the effective teachers' rooms, 90% of the students were on-task 73% of the time. Thus, ineffective behavior management may be one factor that reduces instructional time (Ratcliff et al., 2011).

To come to this conclusion, Ratcliff et al. sent trained observers to 34 second and fourth grade classrooms in 10 public elementary schools in a rural South Carolina school district. All teachers observed had taught for a minimum of three years, were highly qualified teachers

according to No Child Left Behind designations, and had graduated from a traditional college teacher-training program. School principals rated teachers as either strong or needs improvement, based upon their formal and informal observations and student achievement levels. One threat to the validity of this study is that it was one administrator's opinion in each school that categorized a teacher as strong or needs improvement. Thus, this study did not necessarily demonstrate a relationship between a competent teacher and student time on-task, but rather showed a relationship between a teacher categorized as competent by their principal and student time on task. Regardless, the researchers theorized there is a relationship between perceived teacher competency in behavior management and amount of time students spend in on-task learning activities (Ratcliff et al., 2011).

Gilpatrick (2010) conducted a mixed methods study, including 22 third through sixth grade teachers at two schools for the quantitative portion and nine teachers for the qualitative part. Forty-five percent of these teachers stated that more than six times a day a child or a couple children stopped them from completing a lesson. Gilpatrick (2010) also explored the rate of disruptions in relationship to years of experience teaching. Thirty-six percent of teachers who had taught 12 years or more said they addressed disruptive behavior with students 10 or more times per day. In comparison, 83% of teachers who taught fewer than six years reported addressing disruptive behavior 10 or more times in a day. Gilpatrick (2010) also suggested that there might be a relationship between post-graduate education and teachers' abilities to manage disruptive student behavior. Eighty percent of teachers with a bachelor's degree stated they address noncompliance with students seven or more times per week. Only 41% of teachers with a master's degree dealt with noncompliance that often (Gilpatrick, 2010). While the rates of disruption and noncompliance for experienced teachers or teachers who have completed graduate

work were not as high, according to these findings, most classrooms have significant loss of instructional time. This loss may be even more significant when a teacher is new to the profession or has completed only a bachelor's degree (Gilpatrick, 2010).

Ratcliff et al.'s (2011) and Gilpatrick's (2010) results reflected Emmer and Stough's findings (2001) in their review of the literature on behavior management. Emmer and Stough concluded that, by reviewing over 40 years of articles and studies on this topic, teachers' efforts to control negative or distracting student behaviors took a considerable amount of time from academic instruction (Emmer & Stough, 2001). This was one finding from a research synthesis of 90 articles written between the years of 1968 and 2000. There is a need for more research to determine if teachers today have less time for academic instruction because of negative student behaviors.

Researchers hypothesized ineffective behavior management efforts take considerable time away from academic instruction and many teachers recognize that behavior management is a primary concern in their job. According to Gallup and Rose (2005), when teachers request assistance, it is most often for students' behavior and classroom management. This finding comes from the 37<sup>th</sup> annual Phi Delta Kappa/Gallup poll, a random sample of 1,000 adults interviewed by telephone. However, it is not known what percentage of respondents worked in education fields, or how often teachers requested assistance for behavior and classroom management. Participants interviewed were from all regions of the United States, suggesting this is a problem universal to the entire country (Gallup & Rose, 2005).

Researchers sought ways to explain the link between teacher responses to behavior and student actions. Maag (2004) called for the elimination of subjectivity when dealing with student behavior, and those who work with students should describe student behavior in objective,

concrete terms. Maag based this assertion on his synthesis of research and observations of the relationship between teachers' and students' behaviors in the classroom. I describe recent studies confirming or corroborating with Maag's assertions next.

In 2011, Wanless et al. undertook an international study of 814 students in 73 different classrooms. The purpose was to compare United States' teacher behavior management with behavior management of teachers from Taiwan, South Korea, and China. The researchers wanted to understand why United States school-aged children do not perform as well as their peers in these Asian countries. Wanless et al. (2011) found a strong relationship between United States teachers' behavioral management skills and student achievement.

There was not as close of a relationship between teacher behavior management skills and student achievement in the Asian countries. Wanless et al. (2011) theorized that for students in the United States, due to our cultural practices, classroom teachers must place a strong emphasis on behavior management in order to improve achievement levels. In this multicultural study, researchers rated students aged 4-6 years on their ability to perform simple tasks, such as a simple head, shoulders, knees and toes identification. In the United States, students in classrooms designated as strong in behavioral focus performed better. According to these researchers, early focus on behavioral outcomes might be a predictor for academic success. As this study only analyzed one school year, it is unknown whether in succeeding years the high level of behavioral focus would still affect them as greatly. It was also not in the scope of the study to determine what characteristics of United States students made the focus on behavior more important than for students from other countries (Wanless et al., 2011).

Wanless et al.'s research, as well as Ratcliff et al.'s 2011 report, described previously, point to the significance of working with students on good behavior management skills at an

early age. Ratcliff et al.'s study also had implications as to how to promote good behavior management in the classroom. The teachers in this study characterized as "needs improvement" had classrooms with frequent instances of misbehavior by students and constant off-task behavior, such as talking with friends, or students playing with supplies, or students roaming the classroom.

In addition, Ratcliff et al. (2011) observed an ineffective cycle of student-teacher interactions that included student misbehavior, teacher attempts to control the behavior, student ignorance of teachers' requests and persistence of behavior, teachers giving up, and increase in student misbehavior (Ratcliff et al., 2011). In the classrooms with teachers considered "strong" by the principal, students were more active and engaged, teachers interacted more with the students, and researchers noticed less misbehavior. "Strong" teachers used positive reinforcement and rewards more often than "needs improvement" teachers did. The "needs improvement" teachers resorted to coercion, punishment, or retreating or giving up behaviors (Ratcliff et al., 2011). These two studies support the assertion that when teachers maintain a positive behavioral climate in their classrooms, young students may be more likely to focus academically as well as behave appropriately.

Positive reinforcement may be an important factor in behavior management and, thus, student achievement. The theme of positive reinforcement was present in a multi-age study conducted in rural and urban areas in the Midwest United States (Scott, Alter, & Hirn, 2011). Scott et al. analyzed 1,000 observations of classrooms, and summarized data on both teacher and student behavior. They only analyzed time designated as core curricular time, as they theorized it was too difficult to analyze consistently student behaviors during transitional times between educational tasks. By focusing the study this way, they improved upon Ratcliff et al.'s study and



gave a clearer picture of student on and off-task behavior. In Scott et al. (2011), researchers found during core instructional time the students described by the teacher as having behavioral problems received far more negative feedback from teachers than other students did. Teachers gave the same amount of positive feedback to both students with behavioral problems and those who did not. The researchers also found that in the classrooms in which students had behavior problems, teachers tended to provide fewer opportunities for students to talk or ask questions (Scott et al., 2011). The researchers theorized that a coercive relationship was thus formed, in which the teacher and student mutually control each other by not interacting. In other words, there is an unspoken agreement that if the teacher does not bother the student, then the student will not bother the teacher, and vice-versa. The researchers also hypothesized that the teachers tended to ignore these students if they were not bothering the rest of the class. The researchers felt there was considerable incentive for these students to act out, in order to receive any teacher attention (Scott et al., 2011).

The studies described above suggest four main issues may be associated with behavior management in classrooms. First, there may be a link between behavior and student achievement. Second, teachers perceived as competent in behavior management had students who demonstrate more time on task. Third, behavior management is perhaps more important in explaining student achievement in United States schools than in other countries. Finally, researchers found less positive reinforcement in classrooms with many behavior problems.

### **Research-Based Methods of Behavior Management: Responsive Classroom, Art Integration, and Culturally Responsive Teaching**

The school district and the school I studied had several programs and initiatives to address the problems described above. At the time of my study, there were a number of behavior

management strategies and programs used by the school district and at the school site. The main strategies and programs included Responsive Classroom, art integration strategies, and culturally responsive teaching. SWPBIS is also an important program used at this site, and I focused part of my survey on the staff use of this method.

**Responsive Classroom.** Over 120,000 teachers across the country have trained in the Responsive Classroom approach (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014). Responsive Classroom is a framework for instruction and behavior management with a focus on the following components: effective and respectful teacher language, modeling and practicing expectations and routines, student choice, morning meetings, and community building (Responsive Classroom, n.d.). A major tenant of the Responsive Classroom approach is that all children want to learn and can learn (Northeast Foundation for Children, 2009). The Responsive Classroom approach has seven guiding principles: social and emotional curriculum is as important as academic; how one learns is just as important as what one learns; social interaction can stimulate great cognition; children need to be taught social and emotional skills including cooperation, assertiveness, responsibility, empathy, and self-control; knowing children is just as important for teachers as knowing content; knowing families is as important as knowing the children; and staff community is an important factor in effective schools (Responsive Classroom, n.d.).

There are a couple different ways to evaluate the effectiveness of the Responsive Classroom program: student test scores and teacher perception. Rimm-Kaufman et al. (2014) conducted a three-year longitudinal field trial on the effect of Responsive Classroom on math and reading achievement. They collected data from 2,904 children from the end of second grade to fifth grade. Half of these students were in schools that used Responsive Classroom, and the other half were not. They also observed classrooms and evaluated fidelity of implementation of

Responsive Classroom principles in both the intervention schools using Responsive Classroom and the control schools.

Teachers in schools in the intervention group of this study attended weeklong Responsive Classroom trainings during two consecutive summers. They also received coaching in Responsive Classroom, opportunities to attend Responsive Classrooms throughout the school year, and Responsive Classroom manuals and books. The researchers (2014) did not find statistically significant differences in the math and reading achievement levels between the intervention and control schools. They attributed this to the belief that the control group might have used strategies similar to Responsive Classroom methods, as these may be consistent with educational “best practice” (Rimm-Kaufman et al., 2014).

Brock, Nishida, Chiong, Grimm, and Rimm-Kaufman (2008) studied the relationship between student perception of Responsive Classroom, level of teacher implementation, and student outcomes. Their study included 520 students and 51 teachers from six schools in a northeastern United States school district. Students completed a questionnaire on their perceptions, and teachers rated these students on their social competence and academic achievement. Brock et al. (2008) found teachers who used Responsive Classroom practices rated their students higher on academic and social behavior, and students in Responsive Classroom schools reported a higher perception of their school.

Contrary to Brock et al.’s (2008) hypotheses, over time, there was not a correlation between academic or social results and children’s perceptions of school. Additionally, the magnitude of these positive outcomes described above for students and students’ positive perceptions was low. The researchers believed this small magnitude was consistent with the magnitude of change from other research on alternative similar interventions (Brock et al., 2008).

In another study, Rimm-Kaufman and Sawyer (2004) examined the relationship of use of Responsive Classroom to teachers' perceptions, attitudes, and teaching priorities. Rimm-Kaufman and Sawyer collected data from 69 elementary school teachers from six schools. Three schools were in the first year of Responsive Classroom implementation, and three were control schools who had not participated in Responsive Classroom training. They found that teachers who reported using Responsive Classroom had greater self-efficacy and were more likely to respond with a positive attitude toward teaching. They also reported more teaching and disciplinary practice priorities aligned with Responsive Classroom goals. The researchers considered the effect size from the study to be moderate to large (Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004).

Horsch et al. (2002) studied four schools in low income Chicago neighborhoods that implemented Responsive Classroom. The results were drastically different, due to varying attitudes of administrators and teachers, as well as degree of implementation. Horsch et al. (2002) found teachers in these schools had one of three reactions to Responsive Classroom: full implementation and positive responses to effects, partial implementation, and dissatisfaction with the program. The first group fully implemented Responsive Classroom components, reported positively about their experiences, and experienced the most positive outcomes for students. Horsch et al. (2002) felt this group understood the principles of Response Classroom the best. The second group understood Responsive Classroom as one set of strategies to help students, particularly in the area of behavior management. The researchers felt this group did not understand the theoretical framework of Responsive Classroom and understood components of the program at a superficial level. The researchers found moderate positive outcomes for students from teachers in this group (Horsch et al., 2002). Some teachers saw very little value in

Responsive Classroom. These teachers did not implement the program completely. They did not consider it effective for meeting the needs of their high needs and high poverty school communities. At least one teacher in each of the four schools held this opinion, but at two schools, a majority of teachers felt Responsive Classroom was not appropriate for their students. Horsch et al. (2002) recommended that due to the highly complex settings of public schools and the many variant factors in schools, there might not be one intervention program appropriate for every school in a district, state, or the country.

Level of implementation was one of the issues in Blahus' (2013) case study of four elementary teachers using Responsive Classroom. Blahus selected four teachers of grades kindergarten through third grade who had used Responsive Classroom for eight to ten years. Blahus hypothesized that a focus on No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and pressures resulting from that would impact implementation of Responsive Classroom. Blahus found this to be partially true (2013). Teachers who had less training in Responsive Classroom viewed the program as a set of rules for behavior management, and tended to focus on just a couple components of the program. They also were most likely to believe that external sources such as NCLB took away time to implement Responsive Classroom. In contrast, teachers who trained more extensively were more likely to view Responsive Classroom as a comprehensive approach to teaching. They were able to continue implementation of the program despite external pressures (Blahus, 2013).

Blahus (2013) theorized that schools not meeting adequate yearly progress might experience increased pressure from NCLB, and the effect on a program such as Responsive Classroom would be unknown in that setting. She also believed that in older elementary grade levels the testing pressure might be greater, and teachers in older grades might have different experiences in ability to implement Responsive Classroom (Blahus, 2013).

It is noteworthy that Rimm-Kaufman was one of the researchers on three of the five studies I discussed. When I used the ERIC database to search the term “Responsive Classroom”, I located only two peer-reviewed scholarly studies in which Rimm-Kaufman was not one of the researchers (Blahus, 2013; Horsch et al., 2002).

**Art integration strategies.** Art integration strategies may be an effective school improvement tool because students learn content best from multiple approaches and subject areas, and the arts may increase engagement (Artful Learning, n.d.). There is no single way to integrate the arts into the general curriculum. Some schools benefit from financial partnerships with government or arts groups, and some do not. Models of arts integration may include utilizing this strategy daily, weekly, or less frequently (LaJevic, 2013).

Maxwell (2013) found a connection between art integration strategies and a decrease in student bullying. Maxwell interviewed a purposive sample of 15 fourth and fifth grade teachers in an arts magnet elementary school. The teachers reported prevalent bullying and aggressive behavior prior to implementation of in-depth arts integration strategies. After three years of using arts integration strategies, they believed bullying and aggressive behavior decreased (Maxwell, 2013). Maxwell suggested a couple reasons for this. First, students worked cooperatively in small groups on cross-curricular arts integrated units. The practice students had working positively together towards a common goal transferred to behaviors outside of the classroom (Maxwell, 2013). Teachers also reported that as new teachers joined the staff they did not train as extensively in strategies, implementation was not as complete, and the teachers reported an increase in bullying (Maxwell, 2013).

Charland (2011) also explored implementation of a specific arts integration strategy, Visual Thinking Strategies, in a magnet school. Through interviews, a questionnaire, and teacher

reported data, Charland identified three different phases of implementation. The first phase was when teachers learned about the strategy, and began trying it in their classrooms. Charland (2011) believed teachers needed to spend considerable time on this step, particularly in learning about philosophical reasons and educational benefits for using this intervention, so there would be educator buy-in. The second phase was when educators and the school body felt a changed cultural identity, and outsiders recognized this change as well. The third phase was when the school chose to continue this work and promoted it outside the school (Charland, 2011). Charland concluded it might not be possible to get full buy-in from all educators in any intervention strategy, but by spending more time helping all stakeholders understand philosophies and benefits of the intervention, there may be greater buy-in.

LaJevic (2013) conducted case studies of six elementary school teachers integrating art, and studied how these teachers perceive, implement, and understand what they are doing. She found that teachers often undervalue the arts in art integration. Instead of providing rich connections between art and regular education curriculum, teachers often added art merely as a “decoration” (LaJevic, 2013). The result was a trivialization of art and the artistic process. LaJevic offered a couple explanations for this. First, she believed teacher education led most classroom teachers not to instinctually make deep connections between the arts and the general curriculum. Teachers were accustomed to textbooks and worksheets. Second, teachers expressed discomfort with art, and did not feel they had the artistic skills to incorporate it more authentically (LaJevic, 2013).

There is some evidence that art integration strategies improve academic outcomes for students (Hardiman, Rinne, & Yarmolinskaya, 2014; Robinson, 2013; Scripp & Paradis, 2014). Hardiman et al. (2014) found arts integration strategies might increase student retention of

content. They used a small classroom-based experiment of four fifth-grade classes. Two classes received a unit of traditional science instruction, and two classes engaged in an arts integrated unit on the same science content. The researchers administered assessments before, immediately after, and two months after each unit. Immediately after the unit, there was no difference in learning, but two months later, they found significantly better retention from the groups receiving arts integrated instruction. Retention increases were greatest for those students at the lowest reading levels (Hardiman et al., 2014).

Arts integration may also be a tool in decreasing achievement gaps between White students and students who are not White (Scripp & Paradis, 2014). In a three-year longitudinal study researchers looked at achievement rates of students in six different types of schools. All six schools had similar student academic achievement levels prior to the study. Of the six schools, three had a focus on traditional academic instruction, and three had a focus on performance arts. There were four different subtypes of schools in this study. The first school type had an academic focus with traditional arts instruction. The second school type had an arts focus with traditional academic instruction. The third type had an academic focus with traditional arts instruction plus an arts integration program. The fourth school type had an arts focus with traditional academic instruction plus an arts integration program (Scripp & Paradis, 2014).

After three years, the students at the school with an arts focus and arts integration had the highest math and reading scores. Next highest were schools that had some component of arts instruction or arts integration. They found academic achievement improvements after two years, but there was no significant academic improvement after only one year of an arts based intervention (Scripp & Paradis). Students at art integration schools outperformed students at both performance art focused schools and academic focused schools, and at the art integration schools



previously low performing students achieved at levels equal to their high achieving peers. Scripp & Paradis (2013) found art integration strategies help students who were previously low performing academically, and thus art integration may be a useful tool in narrowing or closing achievement gaps.

Robinson (2013) also found art integration might be effective with students who are normally low academic achievers. Robinson evaluated 44 studies published from 1995 to 2011. From these studies, Robinson identified positive effects for students in school with drama integration and multi-arts integration. There were also potentially positive effects for schools with dance integration, visual arts integration, arts integration for students with disabilities, and arts integration as a tool to improve school climate (Robinson, 2013).

Robinson found arts integration learning was effective, in part, because it promoted student self-efficacy and self-esteem. When teachers integrate arts with academic standards it can provide students with multiple opportunities to demonstrate learning, multiple ways to express themselves, and multiple chances for high engagement. This may help the most disadvantaged students-- including students with learning disabilities, students who are English Learners, and students who are high poverty-- increase their academic achievement (Robinson, 2013).

**Culturally responsive teaching.** According to education researcher, author, and speaker Hollie (2012), culturally responsive teaching is “the validation and affirmation of the home (indigenous) culture and home language for the purposes of building and bridging the student to success in the culture of academic and mainstream society (p. 23). Hollie believes culturally responsive teaching, or as he refers to it “culturally and linguistically responsive pedagogy”

(CLR), should focus on culture and not race. He also stresses the importance of the language component, because “we are what we speak” (p. 20).

The purposes of CLR, his term for culturally responsive teaching, are the following: eliminate a deficit perspective on students and abilities, promote validation and affirmation of cultures, focus on linguistic behaviors, and teach appropriate contextual behaviors or “code-switching” (Hollie, 2012). According to The Center for Culturally Responsive Teaching and Learning (n.d.), the organization that Hollie serves as executive director, culturally responsive teaching should be part of daily instruction. Over the past 15 years, Hollie and his colleagues from the organization, who provide professional development to staff in cultural responsive teaching, have worked with over 100,000 educators (Center for Culturally and Responsive Teaching and Learning, n.d.).

Hill (2009) explored components of code-switching practice in a study of a seventh grade English classroom near Detroit. The important parts of code-switching, Hill found, included giving balanced opportunities to write in nonstandard and standard English. Teachers should explicitly teach the difference between standard English and dialects and speech patterns from various cultures. Hill recommended teachers provide nonthreatening opportunities to write in standard English and the home language or dialect, and provide scaffolding to help students learn to write in standard English. Hill stressed the connection of home language and students’ identities, and thus the importance of respecting the home language (Hill, 2009).

Bondy, Ross, Galligane, and Hambacher (2007) identified practices and attributes of cultural responsive teachers. These researchers studied the practices by three teachers considered effective cultural responsive instructors, during the first two hours of the first day of school. They worked in a school setting in which 90% of students received free or reduced lunch, and

more than 90% of the students were African American. The researchers selected the participants based upon their knowledge of their teaching and observations of these teachers the previous year. Bondy et al. (2007) felt these teachers' work with students showed respect, calmness, and a focus on academics. The researchers used videotape and interview data to identify some common qualities and behaviors of these teachers. The following were characteristics of these three teachers: developing relationships, teaching rules and procedures, explicitly including reviewing and revisiting, expecting success, respectfully repeating requests when not initially met, giving consequences calmly, using terms of endearment and using humor, references to pop culture, call and response techniques, and straightforward directions (Bondy et al., 2007).

Relationships were important, but so were consequences. Bondy et al. (2007) believed the teachers' use of consequences was an important aspect of promoting success and resilience in their students. The researchers also spoke of the "insistence" of the teachers. They were what they called "warm demanders", meaning they are firm with expectations yet compassionate. They did not allow all students to continue behavior that did not meet expectations (Bondy et al., 2007).

Ladson-Billings (2006) argued that in culturally relevant pedagogy or teaching, many educators are concerned with how to do the work, when the first thing they should consider is how one thinks about students. Ladson-Billings believed culturally responsive teaching is not a set of steps to follow, but a mindset and a view of students. Successful culturally responsive teachers do not label students as deficient, but instead see them as full of possibilities. Teachers do not just feel sympathy for students, but also empathize with them. Ladson-Billings (2006) believes empathy, rather than sympathy, allows a teacher to build relationships with students but not to excuse students from working hard toward excellence.

Ladson-Billings also recommends that cultural relevant teaching should give respect to students' cultures, but also should prepare them for life outside of school and typical societal demands such as postsecondary education, job requirements, and citizenship (2006). She believes teachers should place the academic achievement and learning of their students first. Ladson-Billings states that culturally responsive teaching is more than raising student self-esteem or helping students gain self-control. It is about cultivating students' intellectual lives. Through engaged learning students will increase their self-esteem and self-control (Ladson-Billings, 2006).

### **Research-Based Methods of Behavior Management: SWPBIS**

According to Maag (2004), the best behavior management methods are proactive. Instead of only reacting to negative behavior, proactive educators plan for and prevent problems before they occur. A preventative approach focuses on antecedents or reasons for behavior, rather than on consequences. Maag's based this mindset and method on Levitt and Rutherford's (1978) idea of positive teaching. In positive teaching, the teacher focuses on changing causes of negative behaviors, rather than just reacting to them. Maag's preventative approach is similar to the conclusions Wieliewicz came to in his frequently cited book: *Behavior Management in Schools: Principles and Procedures* (1995). Wieliewicz took it one-step further and believed one must use a preventative approach, but that it also should be school-wide.

Prevention and application of expectations for all students are two popular techniques in behavior modification. Oliver, Reschly, and Wehby (2011) conducted a research synthesis of quantitative and mixed-methods studies on behavior management interventions. Eligible studies included universal interventions--those that educators applied to an entire group of students, rather than pullout or focused interventions with only a few students. They did not mention

sample sizes and methods of the studies in their report. The intent of their research was to draw broad conclusions from recent research in this field. The conclusion from the 12 studies analyzed was that these universal interventions were highly effective in reducing undesirable behaviors. In other words, students in classes in which teachers had been trained in a universal behavior management program and were using this program with the entire class demonstrated better behaviors as compared to students in a control classroom in which teachers were not trying any new universal behavior management processes. When controlling for differences in duration of new procedure, methods of procedure, and student population, various universal class interventions were equally effective in classrooms of students aged 5-18 years (Oliver et al., 2011).

The findings by Oliver et al. (2011) and the research and writings of Maag (2004) suggested universal interventions and using more positivity with students is effective. This corroborates a recent trend in schools to initiate a program called *School Wide Positive Behavioral Interventions and Supports* (SWPBIS). Across the United States, employees in over 14,000 schools have trained in SWPBIS. Major goals of the program are to reduce problem behaviors and to foster a positive school climate (Debnam et al., 2012). The number of schools participating has increased rapidly in recent years. In 2009, 5,000 schools had implemented SWPBIS. By 2012, that number had nearly tripled. Schools participating in SWPBIS are mainly elementary and middle schools (Flannery et al., 2009).

SWPBIS is a set of data and evidence-based interventions based on philosophies and practices from the fields of special education and school psychology. Although SWPBIS is based upon techniques developed for students in special education, the results and benefits may apply to students in general education settings as well as in special education (Sailor et al., 2006). One

of the major precepts of SWPBIS is that adults proactively deal with the social behavioral needs of all students and put in place plans to prevent social and academic failure (Ross & Horner, 2007; Simonsen, et al., 2008).

Proponents of SWPBIS argued alternative school behavior management methods are ineffective (Ross & Horner, 2007). Policies such as “getting tough” or “zero tolerance” may produce unintended results. According to critics of these plans, the problem behaviors may move to another setting in the school or may manifest as a different type of conflict with others in the building. In addition, the critics suggest adults using “getting tough” or “zero tolerance” policies may harm their relationships with students, and students may develop a negative reaction towards schooling. A pathway between negative behaviors and academic underachievement may be started (Ross & Horner, 2007).

SWPBIS is a method that uses positive reinforcements students find valuable and a building-wide systems approach to improve behavior and climate (Ross & Horner, 2007). When implemented correctly, researchers find that SWPBIS can reduce office referrals and increase academic performance (Sailor et al., 2006). Some researchers also believe it may improve staff organizational health (Debnam et al., 2012).

The SWPBIS model has three tiers of interventions (Ross, Romer, & Horner, 2012). In a typical school, 80% of students respond to the first level, or Tier 1, interventions. Generally, the remaining 15-20% of students will respond and benefit from Tier 2 interventions, which are more individualized. Tier 3 interventions are for a small population of the student body--approximately 5% (Ross et al., 2012).

SWPBIS proponents contend that the first tier of interventions will create a positive school environment for all students and will help all students demonstrate positive social

behavior (Ross et al., 2012). Tier 1 interventions include adults in the building teaching and modeling appropriate behavior to students. Staff ask students to practice these behaviors and test students in their ability to do so. Staff reinforce desired behaviors. Reinforcements include tangible items such as tickets or coins, which may be exchanged or allow students to be eligible to get prizes. All adults participate by teaching and reinforcing these components of the first tier of intervention (Ross & Horner, 2007).

The second tier of SWPBIS includes all the steps in the first tier, but includes additional support for students considered “at risk.” “At risk” students are those who do not demonstrate desired behaviors despite receiving Tier 1 services. Interventions may include more reinforcement for these students, and a more individualized consideration of environmental factors that lead to negative behaviors (Ross & Horner, 2007). Students who still do not respond to Tier 2 interventions receive a third tier of support. Students considered third tier are those who developed a pattern of non-compliance or negative behaviors. With the third tier of SWPBIS, students receive an individualized plan of support based upon a functional behavioral assessment (Ross & Horner, 2007).

Across all three tiers, staff collect data to determine if and how students respond to their level of support. Staff align the level of intensity of the intervention with the severity of the behavior problem (Ross et al., 2012). According to Debnam et al.’s (2012) recommendations, staff should keep methods consistent for all students and in all educational contexts throughout the building.

**Benefits of SWPBIS.** Regardless of socioeconomic status, students may benefit from SWPBIS (Ross et al., 2012). Schools with a high percentage of students in poverty and schools that are more affluent have seen improvement in school climate and student achievement through

SWPBIS. Researchers have described specific potential benefits of SWPBIS for students, teachers, and organizational climate (Debnam et al., 2012; Miramontes, Marchant, Heath, & Fischer, 2011; Ross et al., 2012; Ross & Horner, 2007; Sailor et al., 2006; Stormont, et al., 2011).

Miramontes et al. (2011) surveyed 270 teachers, administrators of schools, and related other school workers about benefits of SWPBIS. They used a convenience sample of individuals from 16 school districts and 35 different schools. All schools were located in a Western state that had a statewide SWPBIS initiative. Ninety-eight percent of these teachers believed SWPBIS had made a positive impact on their schools, and 94% strongly agreed or agreed that the program was worth their time and effort. Ninety-two percent of these same teachers would recommend this program to another teacher. One hundred percent of the administrators believed SWPBIS had a strong positive impact on their school (Miramontes et al., 2011).

Because the Miramontes et al. study used a convenience sample, the responses were from those who completed a questionnaire regarding SWPBIS. It is quite possible those most likely to complete the survey and return were more likely to rate SWPBIS highly. The average number of participants in the survey from a school was under 10, so this study did not capture the general sentiment of an entire building about SWPBIS. One can surmise from this study, however, that those likely to return a questionnaire regarding SWPBIS overwhelmingly viewed the program as positive (Miramontes et al., 2011).

According to the results from another survey by Sailor et al. (2006), the implementation of SWPBIS reduced office referrals and long-term suspensions. The researchers studied student behavior data from middle schools and one elementary school in a Northern California school district that had recently implemented SWPBIS. The researchers found that over a 3-year period



of SWPBIS, the number of more severe behavior problems declined. The elementary school found their number of office discipline referrals went down significantly, although they saw no statistically significant change in the number of suspensions before and after the implementation of SWPBIS. The researchers attributed the reduced negative behaviors to the continued training and implementation of SWPBIS (Sailor et al., 2006).

Sailor et al. (2006) also found schools that implement SWPBIS improve academic test scores. The middle school participating in the study not only saw an improvement in behaviors, but their standardized mathematics and reading scores increased. In the elementary school participating in the study, math and reading comprehension improved by 18% and 25%, respectively (Sailor et al., 2006).

Another purpose of Sailor et al.'s (2006) research was to determine the effects of SWPBIS on children receiving special education services. The researchers believed that SWPBIS training led teachers to differentiate and individualize their instruction more, which, in turn, enhanced special education students' experiences. The researchers theorized that when staff implement positive behavior interventions throughout the entire school, there may be less separation between special education and general education students (Sailor et al., 2006). Sailor et al.'s work added to the body of SWPBIS research because they studied schools currently in their third year of SWPBIS implementation. The results of their research corroborated the findings from other studies indicating a relationship between SWPBIS and general school improvement (Miramontes et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2012).

According to Ross et al. (2012), one way SWPBIS improves climate and student achievement is through increased positive interactions between students and teachers. In 2007, Ross and Horner surveyed 20 randomly selected teachers in four middle schools in Oregon that

had implemented SWPBIS to determine the program's effect on teacher stress and on teacher efficacy about having an impact on students' behaviors (Ross & Horner, 2007). They found a significant relationship between teacher efficacy, a teacher's belief that he or she has the ability to make a change in a student's life, and SWPBIS. Ross and Horner (2007) found schools that implemented SWPBIS with high fidelity had more teachers who responded most highly in teacher efficacy. When a school had SWPBIS implemented with less fidelity, teachers did not believe they had as much of an influence over their students' behaviors and achievements (Ross & Horner, 2007).

Despite only surveying 20 teachers, Ross and Horner (2007) believed the correlation between teacher efficacy and SWPBIS was so strong it was unlikely to be the result of the small sample size. The study also looked at teacher stress, and discovered that level of SWPBIS implementation had no relationship to teacher stress level, although the researchers hypothesized that this may have been due to the relatively low sample size. Ross and Horner (2007) also acknowledged that further explanations would have been possible if they had used methods other than quantitative surveys (Ross & Horner, 2007).

In 2012, Ross and Horner completed a more comprehensive study, along with Romer, on the subject of teacher well-being and SWPBIS (Ross et al., 2012). They surveyed 184 teachers in 40 elementary schools to explore the relationship of SWPBIS implementation on teacher reported burnout and efficacy. They theorized that SWPBIS was associated with decreased rates of teacher burnout and increased teacher efficacy. Additionally, schools with a low socioeconomic status had the most pronounced improvements in these areas (Ross et al., 2012).

Ross et al. (2012) suggested several reasons, based on their research, for these findings. Schools with SWPBIS may experience more opportunities for teachers to have positive

interactions with their students, which in turn may decrease teacher burnout levels. In addition, because SWPBIS may diminish the number of problem behaviors, teachers felt they had higher efficacy towards improving student behaviors. Ross et al. (2012) concluded:

SWPBIS improves teaming structures, opportunities for collaboration, and positive interactions with adults and students. At the microsystem level, SWPBIS increases evidence-based practices, such as the teaching of expectations and the delivery of positive reinforcement. It is likely that both levels of intervention affect teacher well-being. (Ross et al., 2012, p. 126)

Because Ross et al. used survey as the method of data collection, they should not have made causal inferences. Rather, they should have stated that there might be a relationship between SWPBIS and the factors mentioned.

Principals or administrators may also experience positive effects associated with SWPBIS. One hundred percent of administrators in Miramontes et al.'s 2011 study agreed or strongly agreed that they had increased their knowledge and skills of behavior issues and management after they implemented SWPBIS. It was the perception of the administrators of the 35 schools that SWPBIS helped them develop problem-solving strategies for both academic and social issues (Miramontes et al., 2011). There is one threat to the credibility of this study: the respondents had all just completed additional training in SWPBIS. Individuals who have chosen to complete additional training in this area may be more inclined to believe SWPBIS was positive in their school setting, compared to individuals who have not trained or trained minimally in the program.

Stormont et al. (2011) conducted direct observations of 33 elementary classrooms in schools that had implemented SWPBIS with high fidelity. They found that even in these schools,

teacher rates of positive to negative interactions with students were in their opinion less than ideal. Teachers who used a higher rate of positive interactions reported being more efficacious about management of students' behaviors. Teachers who had a lower rate of positive to negative interactions reported being less efficacious. They also tended to use more harsh reprimands and reported a higher level of emotional exhaustion (Stormont et al., 2011).

Debnam et al. (2012), in a survey of 45 elementary schools in Maryland, found the staff climate as a whole might improve through SWPBIS. This study indicated that schools with lower levels of organizational health may take the longest time to implement SWPBIS, but once fully implemented, the schoolwide organization improves the most (Debnam et al., 2012). The design of this study has a limitation: the researchers used trained outside observers to obtain the results. Because the observers were not a part of the daily school culture, they may not have had the capability to assess the school climate fully. It is also unknown if these trained observers had a stake in promoting the benefits of SWPBIS.

Not all researchers found a relationship between SWPBIS, improved academic achievement, and fewer negative student behaviors (Buettner, 2013). In a study of 360 elementary students, teachers, parents, and administrators in a school using SWPBIS for four years, Buettner (2013) found no significant improvement in academic achievement. The study included students in grades three through eight. Eighth grade students improved standardized test scores during this time, but they were the only grade level who did. There was not a significant decrease in office referrals. According to results of surveys of parents and teachers, adults in the school community did feel that SWPBIS had positively influenced the school community. The researcher hypothesized that significant restructuring of the schools and administrative changes

may have contributed to the results (Buettner, 2013). Further studies, under conditions in which there is not great change, would help validate the results of this study.

In the seven studies described above, SWPBIS was associated with beneficial results for students (Ross et al., 2012; Sailor et al., 2006) and teachers (Buettner, 2013; Debnam, et al., 2012; Miramontes et al., 2011; Ross et al, 2012; Ross & Horner, 2007; Stormont et al., 2011). According to the studies, SWPBIS is also associated with benefits for the school environment and climate as a whole (Buettner, 2013; Miramontes et al., 2011; Ross et al., 2012).

**Implementation barriers to SWPBIS.** The researchers I discuss above provide a primarily positive view of SWPBIS. There are some researchers who explored the stages of implementation of SWPBIS, and identified barriers to successful implementation (Coffrey & Horner, 2012; Marchant et al., 2009; Simonsen et al., 2008). Marchant et al. (2009) looked at the development of universal or Tier 1 interventions in a particular elementary school. They gathered data from this school prior to the implementation of SWPBIS, and then again in the fourth year of implementation. Marchant et al. (2009) determined this school did not use data to make decisions about appropriate Tier 1 interventions for the school, nor did the school use data to decide specific skills to teach as a part of Tier 1. This resulted in more students referred to Tier 2 or Tier 3 interventions. One source of data on inappropriate behaviors was office referrals, but the researchers found the officer referral form did not include information as to the setting and other possible antecedents of misbehavior.

Marchant et al. (2009) determined that in order to provide appropriate universal interventions, which could help prevent the need for Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, the staff should gather data that are more specific from students, including data gathered by interviews, surveys, and focus groups. The school followed this step and determined the most frequent

inappropriate behaviors seen at their school. They were then able to create lessons in order to reteach the desired behaviors. The researchers determined that “examination of multiple sources of information appears to create more comprehensive picture of what is happening in schools than does relying on a single data source” (Marchant, et al., 2009, p. 141).

Coffrey and Horner (2012) recommended characteristics of a successful, sustainable SWPBIS program. Schools with sustainable SWPBIS should include staff buy-in, a shared vision between adult stakeholders, administrative support, strong leadership, technical assistance, data based decision-making and communication, and continuous improvement. Leadership was the highest cited factor in sustainability (Coffrey & Horner, 2012). They analyzed results of a sustainability study given in 117 elementary schools in six states and found the importance of leadership was one common theme cited by respondents. Coffrey and Horner (2012) found these results through two different methods: first, an outside reviewer visited each school and conducted surveys, analyzed school data, and interviewed staff. Second, each of the schools’ SWPBIS teams responded to survey questions. From this mixed methods report, the researchers found administrative support was crucial and there needed to be leadership in all implementation steps (Coffrey & Horner, 2012).

Debnam et al. (2012) theorized that when too few staff receive training in Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, sustainability may be negatively affected. They suggest from their study of 45 elementary schools that SWPBIS can improve the organizational health of a school. They also found that many supposed SWPBIS schools are not fully implementing SWPBIS—particularly the use of Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions (Debnam et al., 2012). Additional studies also indicate that full implementation of SWPBIS can be problematic for schools (Coffrey & Horner, 2012; Marchant et al., 2009).

**Potential critiques to reward or token-based school settings.** Educational research provides a bulk of studies on the general topic of positive behavior interventions and supports. A search using the ERIC database and the keyword phrase “positive behavior support” nets 2,954 articles, books, or journals. Of those, 816 also match the keywords “elementary” and “student behavior.” Approximately 400 are 10 years old or less, and through a scan of these abstracts, I found that most focus on benefits of using SWPBIS.

With the widespread use of SWPBIS today (Marchant et al., 2009; Debnam et al., 2012), there are few critics of this behavior management system or of other token or reward-based behavior management systems. Noted author, Alfie Kohn, was concerned about just this type of situation: “The time to worry is when the idea is so widely shared that we no longer even notice it, when it is so deeply rooted that it feels to us like plain common sense” (Kohn, 1998, p. 3).

Kohn rejected a behaviorist view of behavior management, in which the best way to accomplish things was to provide rewards when people behave in desirable ways. A behaviorist view of behavior management, promoted notably by B.F. Skinner, explains who we are and what we do through the concept of reinforcement (Kohn, 1998). For example, we work hard for good grades because we get the reward of an “A” when we have completed a course. Students listen quietly to their teacher because there is the hope of praise or perhaps recognition in the form of a physical token. Kohn, however, believed these rewards and even the praise were an exertion of power by teachers over students. He went on to describe that the more often rewards are used, the more they are needed to elicit desired results in students (Kohn, 1998).

Kohn (1998) believed rewards fail for several reasons. First, he believed that rewards actually punish. They have the potential to punish because if someone is receiving a reward, someone else is not. Additionally, there is also the fear of not receiving a reward, which he

believed was synonymous with punishment. Second, Kohn (1998) wrote that rewards destroy relationships between students and between students and adults. Not receiving a reward may cause ill feelings, and not giving a reward to certain students may cause adults to feel negatively about those students. Another reason Kohn (1998) believed rewards were inadequate was that they do not make adults aware of the reasons why problems occur in the first place. For example, teachers may reward students for sitting quietly and working, but it may not be developmentally appropriate for students of a certain age to sit quietly for an extended time. Kohn (1998) also believed rewards are limiting. He hypothesized that when individuals are working for a reward, they will only do as much work as is required to achieve the reward, and they will not try any harder. Finally, Kohn believed that rewards diminish intrinsic motivation and make individuals only motivated by extrinsic factors (Kohn, 1998).

One of Kohn's main hypotheses was that children already arrive at school as preschoolers or kindergarteners motivated intrinsically to learn (Kohn, 1998). He believed the process of schooling in many settings in the United States diminishes intrinsic motivation and believed that the key was not to find further ways to motivate students, as they get older, but to look for the ways that the school system is decreasing their already present motivation (Kohn, 1998).

Matera (2009) conducted a study that challenged other recent studies that suggest rewards improve motivation. Matera's qualitative case study examined the use of rewards and punishments with 25 sixth-grade students. He collected data from classroom observations, interviews, and an open-ended survey. Matera concluded that when teachers no longer provided rewards or punishments, student behavior returned back to its pre-reward or punishment form (Matera, 2009). Eighty percent of the students self-reported that they returned to their old, less positive behavior after they received a reward. The students he interviewed reported that they



were excited about the prospect of receiving rewards, but that they anticipated behaviors and activities teachers would reward. They tried harder at those behaviors and activities. Matera (2009) concluded that rewards did not have a long-term effect on motivation.

The lack of research on potential negative effects of SWPBIS and other reward-based systems is a gap in the literature. One other gap in the literature is the perception of students towards SWPBIS. The lack of data on student perceptions may be due partly to the difficulty in obtaining permission to conduct research with students. Numerous studies cite student test data or office referral information, but there is a lack of information about how students perceive or respond emotionally to SWPBIS. Matera (2009) explored student reactions to a reward-based system, but this one case study is not adequate to form conclusions about student perceptions.

Although several researchers have begun to study teacher perceptions of SWPBIS, as well as study barriers to full implementation of SWPBIS (Coffrey & Horner, 2012; Debnam et al., 2012; Miramontes et al., 2011; Marchant., 2009; Ross et al., 2012), there is a need for further research. There is a gap, specifically, in research identifying the demographics of teachers participating in SWPBIS, and their specific reasons for full, incomplete or non-compliance in SWPBIS implementation. There is also a noted absence of literature describing any negative effects of SWPBIS (Kohn, 1998; Matara, 2009).

### **Teacher Perceptions of Behavior**

Teacher perceptions of student behavior may influence how teachers choose to address certain behavior problems with students. When teachers have differing beliefs about what a bad behavior is and the cause of that behavior, they may react differently to student actions.

The research studies during the last 15 years regarding teacher perceptions' of behavior address the following aspects: types of negative behaviors witnessed, importance of teacher-

student relationships, effects of reform initiatives, philosophies regarding causes, and strategies for problem behaviors (Chan & King, 2011; Harrison et al., 2012; Irwin et al., 2005; Irwin & Nucci, 2004; McCauliffe et al., 2009; McCreedy & Soloway, 2010; Rhodes, 2010; Simmons, 2010; Thompson, 2010; Tillery et al., 2010; Ward, 2009). The next section of this literature review is a summary and analysis of studies conducted in these areas.

### **Types of Negative Behaviors Witnessed**

What one school staff member considers as a highly problematic, undesirable behavior, another staff member may not consider particularly negative. For example, one elementary school teacher might not be concerned if a student forgets to raise their hand before speaking, whereas another may consider talking “out of turn” a big problem. Alternatively, two school staff may witness two students interacting and interpret it differently: one may see children playing, and the other, kids fighting. Some recent research has examined teachers’ perceptions on the types of behaviors they witness and their interpretations of these behaviors (Harrison et al., 2012; Thompson, 2010; Tillery et al., 2010; Ward, 2009).

Harrison et al. (2012) surveyed teachers across 375 schools, mental health clinics, and hospitals. Teachers completed the *Behavior Assessment System for Children*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (BASC-2) for students they worked with. Harrison et al. (2012) collected information from these teachers on 3,600 students, and found the following behaviors were the biggest concerns: “careless errors,” “distracted from task,” “spelling deficits,” “excessive movement,” “rushing/hurry,” “distracted during lectures,” “misunderstand directions,” “worry about mistakes,” “short attention span,” “lack of concentration,” and “mathematics deficits.” It is to be noted they labeled about half of these negative behaviors as “learning performance” items (e.g., “spelling deficits” or “mathematics deficits”) and half actual disruptive actions that may detract from

learning for self and others in the classroom (e.g., “worry about mistakes,” “short attention span,” etc.). Except for “spelling deficits” and “mathematics deficits,” all other big concerns were behavior management issues. This may indicate that behavior management is of particular concern to teachers across various regions of the country (Harrison et al., 2012).

The researchers also categorized the responses by teachers of young children and teachers of adolescents, and found that different things concern teachers of different age students (Harrison et al., 2012). Teachers of young children were concerned with the following items: “generally distracted,” “does not follow directions,” “reading deficits,” “talking without permission,” “handwriting deficits,” and “overall worry.” Teachers of adolescents found the following most concerning: “self-doubt,” “worry about what others think,” “perfection,” “require repeated directions,” “overall worry,” and “silliness” (Harrison et al., 2012). This study was quite comprehensive, but as the researchers took data from a variety of school and non-school settings, it is unknown if results would have been different if they used data from only traditional schools. It is also unknown if other adults working with children in the schools, other than the classroom teacher, would have had different responses. The majority of behaviors reported as troublesome in the above study were outward behaviors (e.g., “silliness”), rather than internal acts or feelings of students (e.g., “self-doubt”). Teachers in the study found more internal behaviors troubling in adolescents than in young children (Harrison et al., 2012).

Harrison et al. (2012) found teachers report outward behaviors more often than internal behaviors. Tillery et al. (2010) also found that elementary school teachers talk more about observable behaviors, rather than internal causes. Tillery et al. used in-depth qualitative research to gather information from 50 kindergarten and first-grade teachers in the southern United States. The schools participating in this study had recently been a part of SWPBIS training and

implementation. Teachers in this study described student behaviors as things one could see, although they did indicate that internal things could cause these behaviors.

In a qualitative, longitudinal study spanning three years, Ward (2009) studied implementation of a schoolwide behavior system in one elementary school, and one of the findings from this study was the behaviors perceived as the most disruptive or negative by teachers. Ward reported that teachers complained of behaviors that disrupted learning of other students as particularly difficult to deal with. Most upsetting for teachers were the students they considered chronic offenders for whom behavior management techniques did not seem to help.

Research by Harrison et al. (2012), Tillery et al. (2010), and Ward (2009) suggests classroom behavior management related issues are the most concerning for teachers. Specific observable behaviors that cause the most trouble in the classroom may vary slightly depending on the students' age level (Harrison et al., 2012). According to two in-depth qualitative studies, elementary school teachers consider behavior problems in the classroom in terms of the outward, observable actions they witness, rather than the internal thoughts or processes of the children (Tillery et al., 2010; Ward, 2009).

### **Student-Teacher Relationships**

The research described above outlined what teachers found to be troubling behaviors in the school setting. There is also recent research about ways to address negative behaviors. The theme of student-teacher relationships was central to behavior management in several recent studies (Chan & King, 2011; McCauliffe et al., 2009; Thompson, 2010).

McCauliffe et al. (2009) found that teacher relationships had a significant effect upon students' behavior and peer relationships. They came to these findings by collecting data from 12 teachers' second-grade classrooms located in the Eastern United States. Participants were 127

second- grade students and their teachers. McCauliffe et al. (2009) collected data through observation, teacher reports and peer reports. They found a link between a teacher's belief about a student, the actions a teacher took to correct a negative behavior, and the student's chance of exhibiting further negative social behaviors. A positive relationship with a teacher indicated that it was more likely that a student would not react aggressively to situations, and would thus be able to maintain positive relationships with peers (McCauliffe et al., 2009). The researchers did not define with any specificity what made them determine through their observations and data collection a positive relationship versus a negative relationship, though.

Thompson (2010) found similar results in a case study of four middle school and high school teachers in the Midwest United States. Thompson (2010) selected these four teachers as participants in the case study due to a school administrator deciding they had "caring" relationships with their students. Additionally, they worked in schools designated by Thompson as "at risk." "At risk," according to the researcher was a school that had a high rate of minorities, high rate of low-income students, and a high rate of students not making academic progress. According to data collected from teacher interviews, "caring" teacher relationships with students led to not only a positive classroom environment, but also caused students to have a strong sense of efficacy about their own learning (Thompson, 2010). Thompson defined the positive relationships as ones in which teachers exhibited caring actions towards their students. Because Thompson only interviewed teachers deemed by their supervisors to value student-teacher relationships, it is unknown how the results might have changed had Thompson interviewed a random sample of educators, or included more than four educators. It is unknown if other teachers would find the student-teacher relationship less important. This study only describes a

relationship between teachers rated highly by their administration for their relationship with students and these teachers' beliefs in the importance of those relationships (Thompson, 2010).

Chan and King's (2010) study of high school students in the Southeastern United States also analyzed the theme of caring teacher relationships. The researchers explored the term "caring" as a way to help define the teacher-student relationship through a quantitative survey of 48 students and 38 teacher participants. One major finding from this research was that caring relationships are a necessity in the school setting (Chan & King, 2011). Tillery et al. (2010) also emphasized caring, positive interactions as crucial in forming helpful teacher-student relationships, which in turn improve behavior management. The studies described above, although some were limited in their scope, suggest there is a positive correlation between a caring teacher and good behavior management.

### **Effects of Reform Initiatives**

Several studies of teacher perceptions' of behavior took place in the context of school reform initiatives (Rhodes, 2010; Simmons, 2010; Tillery et. al, 2010; Ward, 2009). The researchers of these studies sought to understand and evaluate the way teachers react to a specific behavior management strategy recently put into place. These studies give mixed results of effectiveness of behavior management reform in schools. The designs of the studies, the methods of reform, and other factors contributed to inconsistent findings.

Rhodes (2010) found that teachers who were taught specific behavior management techniques made fewer student office referrals. He administered a short, quantitative survey to 80 teachers selected by a school administrator. The teachers comprised two different groups: their respective administrators considered half of them ineffective managers who handed out too many office referrals, and half were effective managers of student behavior who rarely gave out office

referrals. Both subgroups trained on a specific behavior management technique, and most reported favorably about the technique, and made fewer office referrals. Regardless of the teachers' perceived competence, the teachers mostly found the techniques they learned to be useful. Rhodes (2010) suggests when teachers feel optimistic about the type of behavior management technique, there is increased buy-in, and that teacher buy-in may positively relate to a program's intended results, such as fewer office referrals.

According to some studies, teachers do not always perceive behavior management reform as positive (Tillery et al., 2010; Simmons, 2010; Ward, 2009). In a study of 30 middle school teachers trained in a behavior management evaluation system, Simmons (2010) found that teachers did not believe their training had any effect on their practices. The teachers received training on five important areas of classroom management: classroom rules systems, consequences, circulation (moving around the room or proximity to students), praise, and rapport. Teachers had an opportunity to reflect upon their training, and the majority reported that they did not make any significant changes in their practice in those five dimensions of classroom management. This study also employed observation by school principals who rated teachers based on the five criteria before and after they received training. Principals found that teachers had significantly improved their praise of students and rapport with students. The researcher suggests that praise and rapport are more subjective areas and difficult to evaluate. This might have contributed to the discrepancy between teachers' perceptions and principals' perceptions (Simmons, 2010). The discrepancies could also hint at the overall subjectivity of perceptions of behavior management.

A threat to the trustworthiness of the studies by Rhodes (2010) and Simmons (2010) may be researcher bias. In Rhodes (2010), the wording of the survey may have biased results. Rhodes

hypothesized that training in behavior management techniques would result in fewer office referrals, and that teachers would view the program positively. There were only five questions on the questionnaire, and Rhodes worded all in a way that prompted positive responses. Wording of the questions may have influenced participants, and led them not to consider negative aspects of the program.

Simmons (2010), however, hypothesized that the training on behavior management would have no significant effect on teachers and their classroom techniques. Teachers' survey answers supported the researcher's hypothesis. Simmons did not anticipate that the administrators would observe improvements in teacher behavior management techniques. Simmons attributed this to the subjectivity of the area studied, not to the possibility that teachers' perceptions or administrators' perceptions may have been incorrect, or the possibility that one of Simmons's research hypotheses was incorrect (Simmons, 2010).

In Tillery et al. (2010) and Ward (2009), described below, researchers explored teacher perceptions of two different school-wide behavior management reform systems. Both systems were research based and put in place in elementary schools.

Tillery et al. (2010) explored teacher perceptions after the implementation of SWPBIS in one school district and found that the teachers interviewed had very limited knowledge of this actual system. Some were able to make educated guesses about its meaning, but many did not know how to use the system. All schools in the district received some training on SWPBIS, but teachers interviewed stated that they used their own techniques. Some cited other behavior management systems used in the past in the district (Tillery et. al, 2010). The researchers did not attempt to find out specifically how much training teachers had received, as that was not the intent of the study. A potential improvement to the design of the study could be to ask questions



to correlate the amount of training a teacher received in SWPBIS with teacher responses regarding student behaviors.

Ward conducted a study of the behavior management system, *Discipline with Unity*, (2009) that included in-depth interviews of 14 teachers who had been at the elementary school for at least three years. Teachers reported that the *Discipline with Unity* program helped them change their focus of behavior management from more negative to more positive in terms of interactions with students. The researcher found that overall, student behavior improved, and teacher perceptions about behavior improved. According to Ward, teachers felt better about behavior management at their school because everyone had the same training, process, and all were now involved in the behavior management process (Ward, 2009). A limitation of this study is that the researcher was also the school's assistant principal. As leader of the implementation of *Discipline with Unity* for that school, as well as one of the teachers' supervisors, there are threats to the trustworthiness of this study, including researcher bias and risks to participants.

### **Philosophies Regarding Causes of Student Misbehavior**

Studies that looked at reform in the area of behavior management also looked at the philosophies of teachers regarding causes of student misbehaviors. Teachers may debate the cause of student behaviors, including causes from the home, student personality or individual characteristics; teacher actions or attitudes; the classroom environment; or students' peers. Researchers have not come to definitive conclusions regarding the causes of student misbehavior (Kulinna, 2008; Snider & Roehl, 2007; Thompson, 2010; Tillery et al., 2010; Ward, 2009). In Thompson's (2010) case study of middle school students, teachers believed that home life or student characteristics caused student behaviors at school. The researcher learned through in-

depth interviews that these teachers believed they had the ability to affect their students, but they believed non-school factors also influence actions (Thompson, 2010).

In a different study about teachers' perceptions of causes of misbehavior, Kulinna (2008) found that teachers were most likely to attribute misbehavior to parents. Kulinna sought to add to the small body of research about teacher's causal perceptions of student misbehavior by surveying 199 physical education teachers of grades K through 12. This belief of teachers was also reflective in their choice of consequences. These teachers tended to choose strategies with a focus on removing or referring, or other actions external to the classroom involving parents or a principal (Kulinna, 2008).

Snider and Roehl (2007) conducted a survey regarding teacher beliefs about students, student behavior, and pedagogy. They sent a survey to 600 random teachers from Iowa, Minnesota, and Wisconsin, of which 60% completed the survey. One of the perspectives Snider and Roehl sought was the effect of factors outside of the school in student learning. They found that over half of the teachers believed that factors such as home life or learning disabilities would keep students from learning basic skills despite anything the school might do (Snider & Roehl, 2007).

In the studies on school wide reform described previously, teachers indicated a strong belief in their own importance in affecting student behavior (Tillery et al., 2010; Ward, 2009). Teachers in the *Discipline with Unity* study felt that the system was not working as well as it could due to lack of teacher consistency (Ward, 2009). These same teachers said they were concerned with the placement of children in their classroom with highly difficult behaviors. They were afraid their colleagues would judge them as ineffective teachers because they had the "bad class." This suggests that teachers believe other teachers consider them a crucial factor in

affecting good classroom behavior. It also suggests that teachers are concerned about their colleagues' opinions (Ward, 2009).

In Tillery et al.'s SWPBIS study with primary students, the potential effect of teachers was the most pronounced (2010). These researchers believed that teachers of younger age children believe they have more ability to influence student behavior than teachers of older children do. More research is necessary to determine if a component of SWPBIS training causes high teacher efficacy.

The teachers in Tillery et al. (2010) believed they needed to give children immediate feedback and let them learn from their misbehaviors (2010). In Ward's *Discipline with Unity* study, the teachers did not initially believe they needed to explicitly teach students how to behave. After they received training in a specific method of schoolwide behavior management, they changed their minds and realized that many children do not come to school knowing appropriate behavior (Ward, 2009). Lack of awareness of expectations may cause negative student behaviors.

Differences in developmental stages may also cause negative student behaviors (Tillery et al., 2010). For example, a first-grade student is likely to want to run at unsafe or inappropriate times and to tattle on friends. A fifth-grade student is developmentally interested in peer group relationships and may gossip (Tillery et al., 2010).

A few studies state teachers perceive culture as an explanation of student's behavior (Irwin et al., 2005; Irwin & Nucci, 2004; McCready & Soloway, 2010). In a 2004 study, Irwin and Nucci compared pre-service and current teachers' perceptions of students' locus of control. Irwin and Nucci administered a questionnaire to 120 undergraduate pre-service elementary teachers and to 120 elementary school teachers with at least two years of experience.

Participation was voluntary, and they chose their sample from those who would be working with or currently worked with students of diverse cultural backgrounds. Irwin and Nucci (2004) discovered that current teachers were more likely to view cultural background as a factor affecting classroom behavior. Pre-service teachers were less likely to respond that cultural background affected behavior. Irwin and Nucci theorized that the pre-service teachers, having spent less time in a classroom and getting to know students, were more likely to ascribe other academic theories to student behaviors. Irwin and Nucci (2004) believed that the current teachers had developed more deep understandings of the various cultures of their students and, thus, could approach behavior management in a more culturally sensitive manner (Irwin & Nucci, 2004).

In order to understand better teachers' perceptions of difficult student behaviors and strategies used to manage those behaviors, McCready and Soloway (2010) interviewed 50 elementary school teachers in Toronto, Canada. One of the four main interview questions was whether the teachers believed students from different cultural groups and/or backgrounds have different needs. The teachers were primarily White and middle-class, whereas their students were most often from other countries and living in poverty. The teachers reported that they learned through experience to ask questions of their students, and to inquire of them what was important in their lives and to their cultures. McCready and Soloway (2010) hypothesized that training by classroom management experts can be inadequate to address the complexity of behavior management in a multicultural classroom. They did not believe an outside observer or lecturer could appropriately instruct teachers in this area, particularly if the outside instructor does not have an awareness or knowledge of the cultural or ethnic groups that make up the school. McCready and Soloway (2010) believed that teachers themselves need to become better

observers of students and that teachers should re-examine their own values and beliefs of working with children (McCready & Soloway, 2010).

A third relevant study regarding teachers' perceptions about students' cultures backgrounds was a survey conducted by researchers in Ghana (Irwin et al., 2005). Although this study was in a part of the world where the educational system and culture is significantly different from education and culture in the United States, a major commonality is that Ghana has many multiethnic classroom settings, as does the United States (Irwin et al., 2005). One of the two main research questions was whether teachers perceive culture as a factor in students' behavior or misbehavior. The researchers used a questionnaire with 300 in-service non-degree certified teachers. The researchers received 228 completed questionnaires from teachers enrolled in a class on classroom management and seeking a degree in teacher education. The typical classroom in Ghana is multiethnic, and teacher respondents had been a part of multiethnic classrooms themselves. Seventy-one and one half percent of all respondents agreed or strongly agreed classroom behavior is attributable to students' cultural backgrounds. The researchers asked the question again on the questionnaire with slightly different wording, but results were similar. Nearly 85% of respondents strongly disagreed or disagreed that students' cultural background does not affect classroom behavior. The researchers hypothesized that because the respondents were likely to attribute perceived misbehavior to cultural differences these respondents were more likely to respond in a more appropriate and culturally sensitive way (Irwin et al., 2005).

The studies I described in this section provided evidence about the beliefs of some teachers in specific settings. Because there is a limited number of current studies of teacher perceptions about causes of students' inappropriate behavior (Irwin et al., 2005; Irwin & Nucci,

2004; Kulinna, 2008; McCready & Soloway, 2010; Snider & Roehl, 2007), it is not possible to draw any universal conclusions. The studies from Canada and Ghana (Irwin et al., 2004; McCready & Soloway, 2010) may have implications for educators in the United States; however, it is unknown if there are factors in these international studies which would make direct comparisons between schools in the United States unwarranted. There is not currently enough research on United States teachers' perceptions of causes of student behavior to make conclusions.

### **Strategies for Problem Behaviors**

In Kulinna's study of K-12 physical education teachers (2008), teachers reported the types of strategies they tended to use. Direct discussion was the most frequently used strategy. They reported using positive strategies more often than punitive strategies. When student misbehaviors were severe, they tended to contact parents, use a peer helper, or give a time out. They also rated removing or referring a student highly in their strategies (Kulinna, 2008).

Gilpatrick (2010) also explored teachers' preferred behavior management strategies. In a mixed methods study, Gilpatrick collected quantitative data from 22 third through sixth-grade teachers and qualitative data from nine teachers in the same grade range. Fifty percent of teachers used rewards systems, 45.4% used communications with parents, and 40.9% used removal of privileges. Only nine percent used private talks with their disruptive students, and 13.6% used positive reinforcement to improve student compliance (Gilpatrick, 2010).

In both Tillery et al. (2010) and Ward's (2009) studies of schoolwide behavior management reforms, teachers indicated that they do not know how to deal with problem behaviors. Teachers felt particularly confused about how to deal with students' chronic misbehaviors, and they wished for more administrative support but did not know what form this

support should take (Ward, 2009). In Tillery et al.'s SWPBIS study, teachers believed they were unsure about what actions to take due to a lack of behavior management training. Many stated that they had learned through trial and error. Tillery et al. (2010) noticed teachers did not elaborate or talk about behavior management in any detail. They hypothesized that this was because they did not have the knowledge to do so (Tillery et al., 2010).

Stormont et al. (2011) conducted a survey of 363 general education and special education teachers of early childhood and elementary students. They found that teachers are not always sure if the behavioral intervention strategies they are using are effective. Special education teachers reported more confidence in their interventions than general education teachers did. Special education teachers were also more likely to use evidence-based strategies. Teachers with graduate levels of education were also more likely to use evidence-based strategies (Stormont et al., 2011). Teachers were able to identify research-based strategies correctly as evidence-based, but they not always positive if non-researched based strategies were evidence-based. For example, they were not sure if having a long conversation with students about behavior was research-based, but many incorrectly believed that it was (Stormont et al., 2011).

Tillery et al. (2010) and Ward (2009) both explored the perceptions of teachers regarding positive incentives as a potential strategy for problem behaviors. In both of the schoolwide reform studies, participants mentioned tangible rewards and positive incentives (Tillery et al., 2010; Ward, 2009). Teachers reported using positive incentives, although some indicated that it went against their philosophy to do so (Ward, 2009). Regardless of whether a teacher believed in the use of rewards, teachers agreed that they were effective (Tillery et al., 2010; Ward, 2009).

Another potential strategy teachers mentioned for managing problem behaviors was having and enforcing schoolwide behavior management systems or schoolwide rules. Some

teachers felt their new schoolwide behavior management system was useful in part because it required all teachers to be on the same page (Ward, 2009). Tillery et al. (2010) discussed this as well, and teachers in their study reported that a schoolwide system for behavior was crucial.

In all of the research described above, the topic was teacher perceptions. Cothran, Kulinna, and Garrahy (2003) conducted a study on student perceptions of teachers' behavior management strategies. They held interviews with 182 sixth through twelfth-grade students from 14 schools. The schools differed in demographics, and structure, which the researchers believed increased the validity of the common themes they found. The main themes from the student interviews were: set firm rules and expectations on the first day of class, be consistent with consequences, do not be afraid students will not like you if you are strict, have confidence in yourself with your instruction and classroom management, do not act too strict, build relationships with students, show you care about students outside of the classroom, and treat students with respect and as equals (Cothran et al., 2003). The results from this study may have implications for school staff members looking to improve their behavior management strategies.

### **Conclusion and Areas for Further Research**

Current research on behavior management and teacher perceptions is incomplete. The body of research on SWPBIS is also incomplete. How SWPBIS compares with other behavior management systems is unknown. Are there other behavior management programs that have better results than SWPBIS?

SWPBIS is the current, widely used behavior management system, but few researchers discuss negative aspects of this program (Matera, 2009). It is unclear whether research teams who conducted the evaluative studies of SWPBIS had a close connection with the success of the program implementations. Likewise, few of these studies used any methodology beyond case



study or survey. There is much that educators do not know about the effectiveness of this program as well as other behavior management programs. Research indicates, however, that not all school workers implement SWPBIS plans or other schoolwide behavior management systems with the same fidelity. Most studies do not detail what caused specific things to happen or what factors in the school setting can affect the fidelity of implementation. What effect does the school leadership have? I found no current research that addressed the perceptions and beliefs by the other adults working in a building and what effect these might have upon the fidelity of a schoolwide behavior management program.

Researchers have investigated teachers' beliefs about behavior management system but perceptions and beliefs of the other adults who work in the school building and interact with the children on a regular basis are not available. This includes paraprofessionals and other teacher aides, school cafeteria workers, custodians, recess supervisors, office staff, instructional coaches, home-school liaisons, social workers, and administrators. Previous studies primarily focused only on teacher perceptions and ignored the voices of the many other adults who work with students in a typical day. My findings could help describe current sources of conflict within schools with regard to behavior management, might uncover unknown differences among adults working with students, and could contribute to better schoolwide behavior management for students.

### Chapter 3: Research Methods

The research question that guided this study was: how do teachers, administrators, and other school personnel perceive and manage student behavior in a highly diverse single urban elementary school with a lower than average rate of student achievement in reading and mathematics? To answer this research question, I used a mixed-methods research design. Below I describe the research design and rationale, my role as the researcher, setting, methodology, and trustworthiness.

#### **Research Design and Rationale**

This research was mixed-methods case study. A case study is the exploration of a real-life situation or setting. This particular study was a bounded case study, bounded by one setting studied over a short period. As is characteristic of case studies, I used multiple sources of information from surveys, interviews, and personal observations (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

My goal with this research was to explain the complexity of behavior management perceptions and practices in this particular school. According to Stake, a major goal of case study research is to capture the complexity of a single case (1995). With this research, I used a full detailing of the setting and in-depth personal interviews to provide a rich description of this case.

The specific research for this case study was behavior management at one elementary school. The intent of choosing this site was due to the school's reputation as having behavior management problems, and the below state average test scores of the students. This was an instrumental case study (Stake, 1995) because revelations from this study may help understand severe behavior management issues. It is not an intrinsic case study because the goal is to describe the complexity of behavior management better, not just explain the complexity of behavior management at this particular elementary school. Although the intent of case studies is

seldom to make large generalizations, within a case study, petite generalizations or new understandings of familiar issues can be discovered (Stake, 1995).

### **Role of the Researcher**

At the time of research, I had taught in this district and in this building for four and a half years. I am the classroom music teacher, and I see most students in grades K-5. Depending on enrollment, there is usually another part time music teacher working in the building who sees the other students.

Prior to working at this site, I had experience teaching in two other school districts. Previously, I worked in settings similar to this school in several ways: high poverty rates, large percentage of students who are English Learners (EL), and high student mobility. I noticed immediately that the behavior management problems were more severe at this school than at other settings in which I have worked, however. Students often are physically aggressive with one another, or threaten to hurt one another. Students have hit or physically hurt staff. Students frequently become angry or frustrated and leave classrooms without permission. Students have destroyed classroom resources or teacher materials. Students often talk back to staff, use derogatory language with them, or ignore their requests.

I noticed a negative perception of other district employees towards this school. My colleagues in other schools in the district did not expect my students to achieve as high in music assessments because of the school reputation. Colleagues said this was a place to begin my career in the district, and they assumed I would want to leave and teach at a more affluent school when teaching positions opened.

As someone in the school who sees most students in the building each week, I notice there are very different styles of behavior management by the classroom teachers and other

adults. I notice some teachers are highly structured, while some are very spontaneous. Some adults emphasize rules, whereas some emphasize relationships. Most teachers balance these two priorities and work on building relationships with students while maintaining rules and classroom expectations. Staff in the building demonstrate different priorities when balancing rules and relationships, and I noticed that this causes conflicts among colleagues and confusion for students.

Students at this school have various issues they need to handle. Many students are recent immigrants, are adjusting to speaking a new language, and are living in a new culture. Other students have spoken to me about homelessness, parents in jail, and moving frequently. A local church provides a small bag of food to students every Friday to ensure that students have enough to eat over the weekend.

Behavior management in this setting is of interest to me because of the opportunity I have to see multiple classes in one grade level. There are four or five classes per grade, so I usually teach the same lesson four or five times. I noticed that the lesson and class period do not proceed in the same manner with all classes due to student behaviors. Often, in one or two classes, I am not able to cover as much material as I did with the other classes because of student behavior issues. According to other specialists in the building, this pattern occurs with their instruction as well. If some students are missing instruction because of behavior management issues in music class and other specialists' classes, it is likely that they are also missing instruction in core subject areas such as math and reading. I believed that negative student behaviors were harming student achievement, and I was curious about staff perceptions and opinions of behavior management.

### **Research Setting**

The setting of this study is a high poverty elementary school located in an urban district in the Midwest. The school serves grades K-5 and has approximately 550 students. The number of students fluctuates frequently, as there is a high rate of student mobility. In an average week, there are several students moving to another school, and several students moving in. The school is one of 10 elementary schools in a district composed of first and second tier suburbs of a major Midwestern city.

The 10 elementary schools are very different in terms of test scores and student demographics. The elementary school in this study is one of the schools labeled by the district as “high needs.” Job descriptions on the district website indicate in red font that this school is “high needs.” It has a reputation for being one of the two elementary schools in the district with the most challenging student behaviors, and with the lowest achieving students. It is difficult for teachers to obtain a substitute teacher when they are absent because the school has a reputation for having students who are out of control.

The elementary school in this study has one of the highest percentages of students who are English Learners (EL), and an above-average state rate of students who qualify for free or reduced priced lunch. In 2013, this elementary school had a student population that was 86.7 % non-White, whereas the state average for 2013 was 27%. The elementary school is also composed of 44% EL students, compared to the state average of 7.8%. Across the state in 2013, 38.3 % of all students qualified for free or reduced priced lunch based upon family economic levels. At this elementary school, 83% of students qualified for free or reduced priced lunch (Minnesota Department of Education [MDE], 2014).

Students in the school are not “meeting standards” on the state mandated criterion-referenced tests. In 2013, 35.4% of students at the school received a rating of “proficient” on a state math test. This is lower than the state average for that year, which was 60.2%. In the same year, 27.2% of students rated “proficient” at reading on the state-mandated test, whereas the state average was 57.6% (MDE, 2014).

The school is currently receiving additional assistance from coaches and additional school personnel to make significant gains in test scores. Additional personnel employed at the school include an assistant principal, a Teacher on Special Assignment (TOSA) for academic coaching, a Behavior Interventionist, a part-time behavior coach, a SWPBIS coordinator, an African American cultural liaison, a part-time Spanish speaking cultural liaison, an academic specialist who provides various types of support in and outside the classroom, a school counselor, and an aide who works in a detention or time out room. Each of the people listed above manage negative student behavior that occurs during the day. Employees use walkie-talkies to reach one of these adults should there be an emergency that arises in a classroom or elsewhere in the building. Additionally, there are a couple teacher-aides who serve multiple functions in the building, and they may intervene in behavior management issues.

This school is part of a larger district that began Q Comp the year of my study. Q Comp is a voluntary program through the Minnesota Department of Education (MDE) that asks for districts to design and collectively bargain a plan that meets five components: career ladder/advancement options, job-embedded professional development, teacher evaluation, performance pay, and alternative salary schedule (MDE, 2016). This program resulted in a few significant changes for licensed staff in this district during the time of my study. New peer coaches observed and coached all licensed staff three times per year. Staff were required to write

and provide evidence for a yearly professional growth plan. Staff also participated in weekly Professional Learning Communities, where they wrote a yearly student achievement goal and worked throughout the year to meet this goal. There were also monetary bonuses for teachers who achieve successful completion of professional goals.

### **School Improvement Initiatives**

A number of schoolwide and districtwide improvement initiatives are in place or are partly in place at this site. These include SWPBIS, Responsive Classroom, National Urban Alliance, and art integration strategies.

**SWPBIS.** The school district describes SWPBIS as a districtwide initiative, and some adults in this building have received training. However, not all adults are implementing SWPBIS uniformly throughout the building. The reasons for this are unknown. Lack of full implementation may be due to ethical concerns, lack of knowledge of SWPBIS methods, or other factors.

Staff at the school use several different SWPBIS strategies. There are three different levels or tiers of SWPBIS interventions. The majority of strategies staff use are Tier 1 interventions, which are for all students. For Tier 1 interventions, staff use Bear Tickets, coins, positive phone calls home, and classroom and grade level reward systems. Bear Tickets are small pieces of paper given to students who demonstrate desirable behaviors. The name “Bear Tickets” is because the school mascot is a bear, and each letter of the word “Bear” stands for one desired student behavior. “B” is for belong, which means to work positively as a part of a group. “E” is for empathize. “A” is for achieve, and “R” is for respect. Staff sign their name on each Bear Ticket so it is authentic, and they are supposed to circle one of the letters to indicate what desired

behavior the student demonstrated. Students write their name on the Bear Ticket and put it in a collection box in their classroom. There is a schoolwide drawing every week for prizes.

Another school wide Tier 1 intervention is coins. Staff award a plastic coin to a class following expectations in a public space like hallways or during an assembly. Classroom teachers collect coins, and turn them in monthly. At the monthly school “Pride Assembly”, classes that have the greatest number of coins get a dance party after the assembly. The monthly “Pride Assembly” is also a time when an administrator reinforces schoolwide expectations and reviews the meaning behind the “Bear Expectations.” Often the SWPBIS coach or other staff members organize a skit or other presentation about one of the four components of the “Bear Expectations.”

Positive phone calls home are yet another Tier 1 positive intervention. Administration expects every licensed teacher to make ten positive phone calls to parents every month. The assistant principal collects a log of these calls each month.

Classroom teachers use other positive behavior interventions. Some have tickets or coins that students can turn in for prizes. Some make paper links, or collect small objects in a jar for positive things and have a class party when the class reaches a certain number. Others have class wireless device time, or other fun time in the classroom rewarded for positive behavior. These things are not school wide decisions, but are decisions made by individual classroom teachers or grade level team of teachers.

Teachers do some Tier 2 interventions. Examples of Tier 2 intervention used at this school are behavior contracts, “check-in check-out” process, scheduled breaks, teaching specific behavioral skills, reward systems, and sensory tools. Special education staff led some of the Tier 2 interventions, such as behavior contracts and “check-in check-out”. Special education or



administrative staff most often initiates Tier 3 interventions, and they use these the least frequently.

**Responsive Classroom.** School administration and district administration made personnel aware or provided training on numerous school reform methods aside from SWPBIS. Most licensed staff also trained in Responsive Classroom, which involved a week of training by Responsive Classroom representatives. Many staff members have also completed Responsive Classroom II, which is a second full week of training in this method.

Responsive Classroom is a framework for instruction and behavior management that individual classroom teachers can use, and it can be a schoolwide system as well (Responsive Classroom, n.d.). Some of the major components of the Responsive Classroom plan include effective teacher language, modeling expectations and providing opportunities for practice in classroom routines, giving choices to students, leading a morning meeting to focus learning and set expectations for day, and building of community in the classroom (Responsive Classroom, n.d.).

Teachers at this school use components of Responsive Classroom regularly, including morning meeting, and quiet attention seeking symbols such as a hand in the air. The school behavior management plan includes components of Responsive Classroom, as well. Teachers are to first warn students when misbehaviors occur. Next, they are to ask students to “take a break” at a designated place in the room. If negative behaviors continue, teachers are supposed to ask students to take a “buddy break” in a nearby classroom. While school administration asks and reminds staff to use these systems, teachers do not use them consistently. Some staff use these systems and methods regularly, and others use them scarcely or never.

**NUA and cultural responsive teaching strategies.** The whole staff participated in trainings on cultural responsive teaching strategies, and many licensed staff participated in National Urban Alliance (NUA) professional development. NUA trainers focus on researched best practice instructional methods for students. The predominant philosophy of NUA is that all students, regardless of race, ethnicity, or background, can learn and that all students benefit from a rigorous school setting (National Urban Alliance [NUA], n.d.). NUA trained coaches visited the school and provided classes to the teachers, as well as came into classrooms and did coaching with the teachers and students.

Staff at this school attended at least one training session by culturally responsive teaching author and speaker Sharokky Hollie. Hollie gave a speech to the district during a training time, and spoke to our school staff. He spoke about strategies for culturally responsive teaching. He also talked at length about “code-switching” or helping students bridge a gap between different home and school cultures (Hollie, 2012).

**Art integration strategies.** The fall of 2014, the school became a Turnaround Arts School. The White House Commission of the Arts and Humanities provides money to schools to use the arts and arts integration as a vehicle for whole school improvement. Currently, there are 49 Turnaround Arts schools in the United States. The Perpich Center for Arts Education runs Turnaround Arts for schools in Minnesota. The Perpich Center worked with this school to provide staff development, coaching opportunities and additional trainings, and Perpich Center staff were available for questions regarding implementation (Perpich Center for Arts Education, n.d.).

The Turnaround Arts goals are to increase student engagement, provide incentive to students to do their best in school, and to aid in student comprehension of core curriculum

through arts integration. As a part of this training, an arts integration coordinator was hired. The arts integration coordinator directed a school musical, *Annie*, which involved approximately 75 students practicing throughout the year and performing in the beginning of June. Staff received training in “Visual Thinking Strategies”, “Actor’s Toolbox”, and arts integration lesson planning.

Visual Thinking Strategies (VTS) is a teaching strategy which teachers use art images to address educational goals, such as science, literacy, and text comprehension (Visual Thinking Strategies, n.d.). Actor’s Toolbox is a method in which teachers bring dramatic skills into the classroom through approaching tasks from the viewpoint of an actor or performer. With Actor’s Toolbox, the teacher or instructor will describe the five important tools all actors need: voice, body, imagination, concentration, and cooperation (Education Closet, n.d.). Teachers at the school were to use Actor’s Toolbox daily with students and as an opener in the beginning of the day.

The school staff received training by Turnaround Arts staff and contracted instructors in other arts integration strategies. Arts specialists attended training in stop motion photography and dramatic presentation. The Perpich Center offered other arts integration training to all staff outside regular school days. At these trainings, staff at this school had a higher percentage of attendees than the other schools chosen to be a part of the Turnaround Arts program.

The Turnaround Arts program featured several high profile events. During the first month of school, ABC’s television program *Good Morning America* visited the school, along with two actors and the director from the recent movie adaptation of *Annie*. Local television stations and print media featured the school for this event. The relationship between the school, Turnaround Arts, and Sony Pictures—who produced the recent *Annie*—resulted in a free movie field trip to see the new film. Sony Pictures also arranged for a choir of students, wearing *Annie* t-shirts to

sing holiday music and songs from *Annie* at the Mall of America during their holiday music performances. District staff asked the choir to perform these same musical pieces at the school district central office's annual holiday party.

The Turnaround Arts program also featured coaching and mentoring by a professional actor. Movie and television actor Doc Shaw visited the school twice during the school year. Student performed for him, he and his parent gave motivational speeches, and he interacted with students through positive coaching.

The final event of the school year was the performance of *Annie* in June. Students performed at another school in the district that has a stage, and the entire student body and staff rode buses to this school to see the performance. Local media interviewed staff and students about this experience. Local media once again featured the school and the students positively after this event.

### **Methodology**

It is within this context that I explored the various challenges adults face with regard to student behaviors, as well as what staff can do to make things better. There are a myriad of factors that can affect the school climate in terms of student behavior: school improvement programs, administrative leadership, quality of instruction, teacher experience and training, attitudes of adults towards students, quality and reasonability of school rules and procedures, physical layout of the school and classrooms, student attitudes, and student life experiences. Because of the variety of factors that can influence student behaviors, I chose to study one site for this research. If I had studied multiple sites, I would have had to find ways to control for many of the above factors that would be different from one building to the next.

I conducted the survey and interviews during one semester. As staff attended various trainings throughout the year or big events might possibly occur, I found it important to collect all data during a limited timeframe. The study might have different results if I interviewed some staff before a major training or event, and some staff after.

## **Participants**

I used two different data gathering methods in this study: a school wide survey and qualitative interviews. The sample for the school wide survey included all staff at the elementary school. This included classroom teachers, specialty area teachers such as physical education, media, art and science, Title 1 teachers, English Language teachers, special education teachers, aides or paraprofessionals, administrative staff, kitchen workers, custodians and substitutes. For this portion of the research, I looked for possible trends and commonalities in responses, and I hoped to receive as many completed surveys as possible. I received 20 surveys.

For the qualitative interviews, I selected a purposive sample representative of the following groups:

- Two primary teachers (Grades K-2)
- Two intermediate teachers (Grades 3-5)
- Two Title 1 or English Language teachers
- Two specialty area teachers such as physical education, media, music or science.
- Two educational Assistants
- Two administrators
- Two substitute teachers
- One special services staff member

In sum, then, I conducted 15 interviews with adults who hold very different roles and responsibilities in the school to understand their attitudes and beliefs regarding behavior management perceptions and practices. I sought a purposive sample of adults that was diverse in both nature of work with students, as well as other factors. I wanted to include adults who have worked in the building for multiple years, as well as those who were new to the setting. Age range varied from newly out of college to near retirement. As the student population is primarily non-White, I included in my qualitative interviews some staff who were non-White. Within my sample, I selected individuals from a variety of education and training levels as well. Some participants had a teaching or administrative license, and some were non-licensed staff. I also sought both male and females for the interviews. The school staff is predominantly female, and so the majority of my participants were female. Three of the participants were male, and twelve were female.

### **Data Collection**

I received approval from my school principal to do research on this topic, and the school district's research coordinator approved my application to conduct research. I obtained Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval required by University of St. Thomas before initiating the study. The first step in my research was the survey, which included close-ended and open-ended questions. The second step in my research was qualitative in-depth interviews. Both the survey and interviews were voluntary and confidential.

In the winter of the 2014-15 school year, I administered the questionnaire. I sent an email request to all staff seeking their voluntary participation in the survey. I created the survey on SurveyMonkey Select, and it was available to complete online. As many staff did not have easy access to computers while at work, I also created a paper version of the survey. I left blank

copies in my staff mailbox, as well as a large blank envelope for completed surveys. I used my staff mailbox as a way to keep responses confidential, as I did not know who left surveys in my mailbox.

In the spring of 2015, I selected participants for the qualitative interviews. I identified potential interviewees based upon the criteria I described above, and verbally asked for their time and permission. All potential interview participants agreed to participate. Before I interviewed each participant, they read and signed a consent form (Appendix A).

I used a mixed-methods approach for two main reasons. First, I hoped to find that interview responses help to explain the survey responses. Second, I had two different goals with the different methods. The survey provided data regarding “what” school workers do. My purpose for conducting interviews was to corroborate the “what”, but also to answer “why” and “how.” The interviews gave detailed data and explained the complexity of behavior management (Marshall & Rossman, 2006).

**Survey instrument.** Because SWPBIS is the predominant behavior management system that the school and the district use, I grounded my behavior management questions within the context of this system. The survey I developed (Appendix B) contains questions regarding the use of SWPBIS as well as more general behavior management practices. The purpose of the survey was to gather preliminary data regarding behavior management practices at this elementary school. I developed this survey using structured response categories, as well as some open-ended questions. This was a cross-sectional measurement made at a single point of time (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). I developed this survey using structures, methods, and considerations recommended by Nardi (2006) and Macfarlane (2009).

The survey had three sections. The first two sections were close-ended. The first section contained four short questions regarding the nature of the adults' work in the building and training levels. The next section of the survey asked the adult to identify the most disruptive student behaviors from their perspective, to rate the most important things they do to elicit positive behavior from students, to identify what positive behavior interventions they use, the frequency to which SWPBIS is used, and the potential barriers to implementing SWPBIS. The third section contained open-ended questions. In this section, adults identified the school behavioral goals that were most important for them to reward. For example, they identified whether they are more likely to reward a student for achieving a high score or for helping a classmate.

**Interviews.** During the spring of the 2014-2015 school year, I conducted the interviews with the representative sample of school personnel. I conducted interviews in the classroom I teach, to eliminate potential disruptions and allow for more confidentiality. As per the school district's requirements for research, I scheduled interviews outside of the licensed staff contract day. I planned for approximately 45 minutes for each interview, but allowed interviews to last shorter or longer depending on the depth of answers each respondent provided. I interviewed each individual once. I completed the interviews during a one and one half-month window. It was important to have the interviews conducted during a short time frame, as there were unknown factors that could influence responses. For example, if the majority of the personnel underwent training on behavior management in the middle of the interviewing window, the responses before and after the training might be different.

I used a semi-structured interview guide for the interviews (Appendix C). The interview included the presentation of specific hypothetical scenarios with students, and I asked the



respondents to provide their opinions of these situations. I also included questions regarding the individuals' philosophies, perceptions and experiences with behavior management. Participants received a written copy of questions during the interview. I recorded the first two interviews on QuickVoice for iPhone, and I recorded the remaining thirteen interviews with a handheld digital recorder. I transcribed the interviews myself in the two months following the last interview.

## **Data Analyses**

### **Survey**

My goal with the survey was to obtain more data about what staff at this school do in terms of behavior management, and specifically regarding the behavior management system supported by the building and the district, SWPBIS. I created the survey using SurveyMonkey Select, and SurveyMonkey provides graphs of the results and frequencies of participants' responses. I downloaded results into an Excel file. If the responses were on a continuous scale, I calculated means and ran some correlations between selected variables. I created graphs or charts for each question on the survey.

### **Qualitative Interviews**

My goal with the qualitative interviews was to find out more about what staff do regarding behavior management as well as to explore their perceptions about multiple aspects of behavior management. The first step in coding and analyzing the data was open coding. Open coding, according to Strauss and Corbin (1990) includes naming and categorizing events and phenomenon through a process of close examination of data. I used several processes to accomplish this open coding. I sorted the participants' responses into new documents according to each interview question and inserted a code or label for aspects of their responses. For

example, I made observer comments (OC) in the margins that identified a concept to responses (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

An additional part of my open coding step was to create a separate document for each question that I titled “Question 1 Notes,” “Question 2 Notes,” etc. In these documents, I listed the concepts I had discovered, as well as wrote down any questions I had about the raw data. While labeling the concepts, I avoided terms or phrases that might already have strong connotations. I chose conceptual terms that carried little emotional connotation. For example, rather than naming a concept “making excuses for students,” I used the phrase “justifications for student behavior.” I also used terms named by the participants, or *in vivo* codes (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

The second stage of coding was the axial coding stage. In this part of the process, I put the data back together from open coding by looking for connections between conceptual categories (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). I created a Microsoft Word document that I titled “Summary of Open Codes.” I made a list of every topic that subjects talked about, sorted by the question. I looked for common themes that occurred in multiple questions. I then created another Word document, “Index of Open and Axial Coding.” I used this document to keep account of broader categories, reoccurring themes, noted who brought them up, which question they were addressed in, and how often participants mentioned them (Appendix D).

The third stage of coding I undertook was selective coding. During this step, I decided upon the most salient and important findings from my research, and re-analyzed the data based upon these assumptions. I identified the core category from my research, and looked for ways that other categories and themes related to that core category (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).

An example of how I went through this process is the way I coded the concept of student home life. My first step, as a part of open coding, was to write observer comments each time participants mentioned student home life. I gathered these in my “notes” document for each interview question. As a part of the second stage of coding, axial coding, I went through my notes and found all the instances participants talked about home life. I noticed this could be grouped with several other findings, including counteracting negative things learned at home, home life is not the only factor in misbehavior, blaming parents, praising parents, negative views of home life, and positive views of home life. I noted who spoke about each of these subthemes, and where in their interviews they did so. I also determined that the theme of home life was a part of a larger category—ways staff talk about students.

During the third stage of coding, I pulled quotes from each of the subthemes of home life. I looked for relationships between what participants said about these. For example, for the subtheme “counteracting negative things learned at home,” I analyzed the three quotes I had. I looked for things that interviewees said that were similar, and I looked for things that were contrasting. I also looked to understand how these quotes fit as a part of the larger theme of home life, the category ways staff talk about students, and the research questions.

### **Trustworthiness**

In qualitative research, a researcher may establish or ensure trustworthiness by satisfying four different criteria: credibility, dependability, transferability, and confirmability (Shenton, 2004). In the following sections, I describe the steps I took to meet each of these criteria.

#### **Credibility and Dependability**

Credibility means that the researcher will “seek to ensure that their study measures or tests what is actually intended” (Shenton, 2004, p. 64). In qualitative research, dependability is

based on whether the findings are reasonable based on the data collected (Pitney, 2004). Some steps overlapped and were part of both credibility and dependability.

There are several steps that I took to have credibility and dependability in this study. The first step I took was to practice my interview questions with teachers not at this site. During the summer of 2014, I met with one current educator and one former educator, and we discussed my interview guide. This helped to determine that my interview questions were clear and that the questions truly addressed the guiding research questions.

Then, I ensured that I used “appropriate and well recognized research methods” (Shenton, 2004, p. 73). As a teacher at the site I was studying, I also was very familiar with the culture of the school. I used a mixed-methods case study. The survey provided data about the school, but it also served as a tool to verify some trends and actions in staff behavior management, revealed through the interviews.

Another important aspect is ensuring honesty of the participants (Shenton, 2004). All surveys were confidential, so survey respondents had minimal risk in participating. Participants did not receive anything for participating and, as I had no position of authority over them, their risks were minimal. I told participants that if they did not feel comfortable with the interview or the survey they could withdraw their participation. Finally, in the guided interview, I did not ask questions that evaluated anyone’s practices.

One other step I took in ensuring credibility and dependability was negative case analysis. I actively looked for explanations that did not support my developing conclusions (Maxwell, 2013). I also kept notes of my processes in analyzing and theory development, or what Shenton calls “reflective commentary” (Shenton, 2004, p. 68). My dissertation chair gave feedback on my conclusions and looked for any biases and assumptions (Maxwell, 2013).

Member checks are an important step in both credibility and dependability (Shenton, 2004). I used member checks to verify some main themes that I discovered in the interviews. I spoke with participants after their interviews, and confirmed that I had interpreted what they spoke about in the way they had intended. Through this, I increased the credibility and dependability of themes I identified.

A final measure in credibility and dependability is a full, detailed description of the setting and phenomenon under study. I describe the setting and the conditions of the site, which led to the decision to choose this as a place of research, fully in the beginning of Chapter 3. My goal with this, as well as the other steps described above, was to make sure that the “research findings capture what is really occurring in the context, and whether the researcher learned what he or she intended to learn” (Pitney, 2004, p 26).

### **Transferability**

While the results of my study may not be generalizable across multiple settings, I have taken steps to allow readers to determine if there is transferability to their school settings. In qualitative research, a goal is not necessarily generalizability, but instead for the potential of transferability (Pitney, 2004). One step I took to accomplish this was to provide a detailed description of the site. Maxwell (2013) recommends rich, detailed data in qualitative research. Because I gave a detailed account of the setting, others working in the education field may determine if there are similarities between their site and the place of my study. Educators can look at similarities and differences and decide if and how my results might be transferable to their settings.

Other researchers who studied perceptions of behavior management looked at just classroom teachers (Chan & King, 2011; Harrison et al., 2012; Irwin et al., 2004; Irwin & Nucci,

2004; McCauliffe et al., 2009; McCreedy & Soloway, 2010; Rhodes, 2010; Simmons, 2010; Thompson, 2010; Tillery et al., 2010; Ward, 2009). This study has more transferability, as I sought people in various job roles at the site for the survey and interviews. I hoped to capture a broader picture of perceptions of behavior management with my study and, thus, my results may be transferable to classroom teachers and individuals with other jobs, alike.

### **Confirmability**

I took several steps to ensure confirmability or to guard against researcher bias. The first thing I did was carefully word my interview questions so as to not lead participants to an answer. I wrote some questions deliberately broad, such as “What effect does home life have on student behavior?” I did not assume in my question that it would have either a negative or a positive response. I kept my questions neutral so that I would not lead the participants to answer in one direction or another.

Multiple data sources and member checks, as described above, were two other steps in confirmability that I used. I also described my own position in the site, and my own opinion that there is a wide range of behavior management perceptions at the school. I anticipated that not everyone felt the same way about behavior management. One thing that I did discover that was not what I had anticipated was the number of beliefs and actions that participants had in common.

Another method I used to maintain objectivity was peer audit review. My dissertation chair coded portions of interview transcripts to compare our data categories and interpretations. To make sure that my themes and discoveries were from the data, I kept notes and an audit trail of my processes in development of themes. In the Data Analysis section, I describe the steps I took in the development of data.

### **Risks and Benefits**

I was the researcher and I have professional relationships with the participants. Many of the participants and I had already had multiple conversations regarding behavior management. I explained to members of the sample that I was not evaluating their behavior management strategies; instead, the goal of the study was to find what they currently do and what they believe. Because I am not in a position of authority in the building, I do not have influence over how people in positions of power evaluate or treat people.

Neither the survey respondents nor the qualitative interview participants received any tangible rewards for participating in the study. Survey participants had the option to discontinue their participation up until they completed the survey. Qualitative participants had an opportunity to remove themselves from the study at any time during the interview. Their data would not be included if they chose to discontinue. They could also choose not to answer any questions. I provided them with phone numbers of my dissertation chair and the University of St. Thomas Review Board, if they had any questions.

### **Confidentiality**

Records produced included interview oral recordings, written notes, computer documents, and consent forms. I will keep the records of this study confidential. I did not identify study participants by name in the recordings, written notes, and computer documents. I kept a key of participant names, which I stored on my password-protected laptop. I saved a copy of my work on a network attached storage (NAS) device in my home. The study materials on the NAS were password protected and no other members of my household were able to access my password-protected files.

In order for this study to be valid, I assured staff members that their answers were confidential. I used an internet-based survey site that did not identify respondents by email addresses. I provided a written option for the survey, and I left a blank envelope in my mailbox in the staff workroom that respondents could leave completed surveys.

A component of this study was identifying the responses based upon the grade level taught. There are only four to five classroom teachers in each grade level, and only two teachers in each grade level who work in a push-in model with the students. In order to help staff feel their responses were more confidential, I did not ask staff to identify their exact grade level. For the survey, I asked participants to self-identify as belonging to one of the following groups: “K-1,” “2-3,” “4-5,” or “K-5.”

For the qualitative interviews, I refer to participants by a number. I selected two classroom teachers from primary grades “K-2,” and two from intermediate grades “3-5.” I refer to them as belonging to one of these groups. I chose this grouping because I hypothesized that grade levels near one another have more closely related behavioral needs. I also referred to participants by their general job title, such as “classroom teacher,” or “specialist,” when doing so would not make it obvious to a potential reader their identity.

As the majority of staff members are female, I did not identify either the survey or the interview participants by their gender. I used the word “they” rather than “he” or “she” whenever I was not able to make other writing stylistic choices suggested by the American Psychological Association. Although the American Psychological Association has not officially changed their guidelines for the use of “they,” this is an area of debate and many professional publications have endorsed the use of “they” when avoiding using a specific gender (Lee, 2015). I used “they” because for males participating in the study, using “he” may have unintentionally given



away their identity. I also did not identify staff members by race, as the majority of staff members are White and, by writing about a participant's race and responses together, a reader might be able to make a reasonable guess as to identities.

Participation in the study was voluntary. I informed all members of the sample that I would not name them in the study, nor would any students be named or identifiable. However, I made participants aware that complete anonymity would not be possible with the nature of this study. All will have access to the completed dissertation.

### **Conclusion**

In light of the status of this particular elementary school as one that is not making adequate yearly progress on standardized tests, it is important to conduct research on one potential factor that may contribute to low test scores. Because there may be a strong correlation between behavior management and test scores, improving the behavior management processes in schools could potentially raise test scores. A better understanding of adults' perceptions regarding behavior management is an important step for improvement of educational practices.

## Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to learn how personnel perceive and manage student behavior in a highly diverse single urban elementary school with a lower than average rate of student achievement in reading and mathematics. In the following sections, I describe the results of the survey and the results of the qualitative interviews.

### Survey Results

In this mixed-methods case study, I first conducted a survey. My goals for the survey were to gather more information about how staff at this school manage student behavior and their experiences and practices regarding SWPBIS. I invited all staff to participate in this survey in February of 2015, and I sent a reminder email in March of 2015. I received 21 responses to the survey. Twenty individuals responded via online SurveyMonkey. One person responded by the hard copy I provided. The individual who responded by hard copy answered six questions inappropriately, so I invalidated this survey. The results I discuss below are the 20 responses I received through the electronic SurveyMonkey platform.

### Demographics

This study was open to all non-licensed and licensed staff at the school. Of the twenty people who responded to demographics questions, three worked with K-1, seven worked with grades 2-3, five worked with grades 4-5, and five worked with all grades in the school (K-5).

One of my primary goals was to gather information from personnel who work in a variety of different roles. Nearly half of those who responded were classroom teachers. Other participants included English Language Learner teachers, Title I teachers, Specialist teachers, aides, and those who considered themselves “other.” Table 1 lists the number of staff in each role.

Table 1

*Participant Role in Building*

<u>Role</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>%</u>
Classroom teacher	9	45
Other	3	15
Specialist teacher	3	15
English language teacher	2	10
Title I teacher	2	10
Aide	1	5
Administration	0	0
Special education teacher	0	0
Food service or custodial	0	0
Substitute	0	0

As shown in Table 2, the survey respondents had a variety of years of experience in the building. Nearly half the respondents worked in the building for over ten years. Twenty-five percent had worked in the building zero to two years.

Table 2

*Length Survey Participants Worked at Site*

<u>Years</u>	<u>Count</u>	<u>%</u>
0-2	5	25
3-5	1	5
6-10	5	25
Over 10	9	45

Staff who responded to the survey had varying amounts of training in SWPBIS. They responded in a survey question about their highest level of SWPBIS experience. One survey participant had led trainings, 11 had attended at least one district or outside provider training, six had attended training in the building, and two had participated in no SWPBIS trainings.

**Most Disruptive Student Behaviors**

The first survey question was about disruptive student behaviors in a typical week. I asked participants to respond about specific potential disruptions by assigning each a number

value between one and five: 1 being “not disruptive at all,” and 5 being “very disruptive.” Table 3 contains the results.

Most respondents believed talking out of turn was the most disruptive student action. Seventeen out of 19 respondents indicated talking out of turn was a “3,” “4,” or “5” in level of disruption. Sixteen respondents thought student inattention was a “3,” “4,” or “5.” Verbal arguments and physical aggression were student actions that were least disruptive in a typical week. Getting out of a designated spot and insubordination each were not rated as very disruptive for the majority of respondents, but many found them moderately disruptive.

Table 3

*Most Disruptive Student Behaviors in a Typical Week*

Behavior	Level of disruption					Mean
	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	
Talking out of turn	0	2	8	7	2	3.47
Student inattention	3	0	10	5	1	3.05
Out of designated spot	2	7	4	5	1	2.79
Insubordination/refusal	3	6	6	3	1	2.63
Verbal arguments	5	7	3	1	1	2.18
Physical aggression/fights	13	1	2	1	2	1.84

*Note: 5 is the “most disruptive,” 1 is the “least disruptive”*

**Most Important Actions for Establishing and Maintaining Desired Student Behaviors**

The next survey question was, “How important are the following in setting up and maintaining desired student behaviors, “1” is not important at all, “5” is very important.” The five options I provided for ratings were: establishing classroom rules and norms, use of positive incentives (SWPBIS), building relationships between adults and students, consequences for undesired behaviors, and creating engaging lessons or environments. The results are in Table 4.

All survey participants rated “establishing classroom rules and norms” a “4” or a “5,” indicating that this is very important. “Building relationships between adults and students”

received the same number of responses in each rating. The next staff action, that was rated as highly important by the greatest number of respondents was “creating engaging lessons or environments.”

Respondents did not agree on “use of positive incentives (SWPBIS).” Ten participants considered this action a “5” or very important, five gave it a “4” and four gave it a “3,” or moderately important. This action by school staff was viewed as somewhat important, but not as many people rated it as highly important as “classroom rules and norms,” “building relationships between adults and students,” and “creating engaging lessons or environments.” The only staff action that I listed that received ratings any lower than a “3” was “consequences for undesired behaviors.” Only six respondents gave this a “5,” eight gave it a “4,” three gave it a “3,” and two respondents thought it was not very important, and assigned this a “2.”

Table 4

*Importance of Various Steps in Establishing and Maintaining Desired Student Behaviors*

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>Mean</u>
Establishing classroom rules and norms	0	0	0	1	18	4.95
Building relationships	0	0	0	1	18	4.95
Engaging lessons or environments	0	0	1	2	16	4.79
Use of positive incentives (SWPBIS)	0	0	4	5	10	4.32
Consequences for undesired behaviors	0	2	3	8	6	3.95

*Note: 1 is not important at all, 5 is very important*

### **Forms of SWPBIS Used**

I asked two questions on the survey regarding which forms or types of SWPBIS staff use. Question 7 was, “Which form of School Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports do you use most often? (Circle one)” Nineteen people responded to this question. Nine answered Bear Tickets, four answered coins, and six answered “other.” Zero people responded, “I don’t use any.” Thirty-one percent responded that they used “other.”

Question 17 of the survey was, “Do you use any other forms of incentives or School Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports with students? Please describe below.”

Twelve respondents described other positive interventions that they use, which I have listed in Table 5. Staff reported using a variety of other methods. One that was common was positive phone calls home. Six respondents mentioned positive phone calls home as an incentive.

Administration had asked staff to make ten positive phone calls every month. Five respondents wrote about whole class incentive systems they use, such as collecting paper links until they reach a certain point and get a class reward, or using play money to turn in for tangible rewards.

Table 5

*Other Positive Incentives Used*

<u>Respondent</u>	<u>Incentive</u>
Respondent 1	Whole class earns 20 links or marshmallows for class reward Positive phone calls and notes home
Respondent 2	Play money to save and turn in for incentives
Respondent 3	Positive phone calls home Positive conferencing with students
Respondent 4	Positive phone calls home
Respondent 5	Positive phone calls home Praise Extra computer time
Respondent 6	Verbal praise Listen to student Show respect to the student
Respondent 7	Coins in the hallway
Respondent 8	Points for work completed to buy prizes
Respondent 9	Praise Positive phone calls
Respondent 10	Tally marks in class for groups Class behavior link to earn a class party Personal notes to kids (Two per week)
Respondent 11	Draw Bear Tickets every Friday for rewards Write up positive behavior forms Positive phone calls
Respondent 12	Lunch with teacher

## Use of Bear Tickets

Questions 8 and 9 on the survey asked how many Bear Tickets staff give out. Question 8 was, “How many Bear Tickets do you estimate you handed out yesterday?” The most common response was that a participant handed out 1-10 during the previous day. Only one person handed out more than 20 in a single day (Table 6).

Table 6

### *Estimated Bear Tickets Given Out In One Day*

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
0	5	26%
1-10	8	42%
11-20	5	26%
Over 20	1	5%

The second question about frequency of Bear Tickets was, “How many Bear tickets do you estimate you handed out last week?” Based on the responses to this question, most respondents gave out only 0-25 Bear Tickets in a week. Only two participants responded that they give out over 50 Bear Tickets in a week. Results are in Table 7.

Table 7

### *Estimated Bear Tickets Given Out In One Week*

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
0-5	7	36.8%
6-25	7	36.8%
26-50	3	15.8%
Over 50	2	10.5%

## Reasons Participants Give Positive Incentives

The tenth survey question was, “Why do you give out positive incentives, such as Bear Tickets, coins, or other? (You may circle more than one)” Choices for responses were, “it is a district initiative,” “it helps improve student behavior,” “it rewards students who always do the

right thing,” and “it helps students who are struggling.” As shown in Table 8, most respondents in the survey said that they give out positive incentives because it “rewards students who always do the right thing.” Slightly more than half also agreed that it helps improve student behavior. Nearly half thought it helps struggling students. Just over a third said they give out positive incentives because of the district requirement.

Table 8

*Reasons Staff Give Positive Incentives*

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>Number</u>	<u>Percent</u>
It rewards students who always do the right thing	16	84.2%
It helps improve student behavior	11	57.9%
It helps students who are struggling	9	47.4%
It is a district initiative	7	36.8%

*Note: Percentages exceed 100% because respondents could select multiple answers.*

## **Bear Expectations**

Question 11 of the survey was, “Which Bear student expectations are you most likely to recognize or reward? Please rank 1-4 the Bear student expectations in the order for which you most frequently hand out Bear Tickets: (i.e. 1 for ‘most likely to recognize,’ 2 for ‘second most likely to recognize,’ etc.)” Table 9 is a summary of these rankings. Questions 12, 13, 14, and 15 asked participants to give a specific student behavior that they have rewarded for each of the four areas. Twelve to fourteen people answered each of the questions about specific behaviors. One person, when asked about specific behaviors that they reward said, “I just hand them out when a student is doing what they should be doing. I never circle the BEAR part nor do I even think which letter they are following.”



Table 9

*Rankings of Bear Student Expectations Most Likely to Reward*

<u>Answer Options</u>	<u>1</u>	<u>2</u>	<u>3</u>	<u>4</u>
Belong	4	0	6	0
Empathize	0	6	9	4
Achieve	10	3	2	4
Respect	5	10	2	2

**Belong.** Four survey respondents indicated that they were most likely to give out a Bear Ticket when students are demonstrating the behavior “belong” by ranking this as number 1. Twelve participants answered Question 12, which was, “What is one student behavior that you have rewarded as ‘Belonging?’” Respondents answered, “worked hard in their group,” “being nice to others,” “group or partner work done well,” “watching an old student helping a new student,” “helping a new student with school routines,” “being a friend to someone,” “student helping another student to make them feel included,” “positive attitude, participating,” “the student comes on time to the table,” “in line behavior,” “picking partners,” and “checking in with another student who is upset.”

**Empathize.** This was the lowest ranked Bear Student Expectation for receiving a Bear Ticket. No participants ranked giving out Bear Tickets most frequently to students for empathizing. Fourteen respondents answered the question, “What is one student behavior that you have rewarded as ‘Empathizing?’” Four responded that they reward a student for empathizing when they help other students. Other responses that were more specific were: “helping student who couldn’t find their folder,” “when a student dropped some things, another student quickly went over to help pick it up,” “watching a 5<sup>th</sup> grader helping a kindergartener,” “helping a classmate who was crying,” “helping a student to the health office,” “student helping a new student because they know what it’s like to be new in school,” “the student found another

student's folder on the ground and went to find the person and then gave the student their folder," "helping a student with their work," and "giving another student space when they need it."

**Achieve.** Ten respondents ranked "Achieve" as a "1," for most likely to give a Bear Ticket. Fourteen people answered this question, and I listed their responses in Table 10. Some respondents considered a student to "achieve" if they answered a question, were on task, or completed work. Others considered achieving as doing something beyond what they expected, such as "going above expectation during a lesson or doing extra work," or "a student taking their time on their work to do their best."

Table 10

*Behaviors Staff Consider "Achieving"*

<u>Participant</u>	<u>"Achieve" behavior or action by student</u>
1	Answered a math question
2	Working on what they are supposed to Asking good questions
3	Answering questions with a thoughtful answer
4	Someone going above and beyond in class discussion
5	Working hard on a class activity
6	Going above expectation during a lesson or doing extra work
7	Using an inhaler correctly
8	A student taking their time on their work to do their best
9	Working hard on a task
10	Completing their work
11	Doing their very best
12	Completing work
13	Not giving up when it gets hard
14	Hard work

**Respect.** "Respect" was a Bear Expectation that survey respondents ranked most frequently as a "1" or a "2." Five respondents gave "respect" a "1," or were most likely to award a student a Bear Ticket for this, and ten respondents gave "respect" a "2." Table 11 shows specific examples for "respect."

Table 11

*Behaviors Staff Consider “Respect”*

Participant	“Respect” behavior or action by student
1	Listened to what another student had to say
2	Listening and following directions
3	Using kind manners
4	A student helping a visitor
5	Working together well during a partner activity
6	Using positive language
7	Appropriate and respectful behavior in the health office, such as saying “thank you”
8	A student waiting to talk to a teacher who is in another conversation (Not interrupting)
9	Helping to clean up when not asked
10	The student was listening to another student’s story and was very respectful in responding
11	Thank you
12	Listening and following rules
13	Listening to another student
14	Tone of voice when discussing a difficult situation

**Ability to Use Positive Incentives**

Question 16 of the survey was, “Are there any factors that make it difficult to hand out Bear Tickets or coins?” Twelve people responded to this question. Three people said “no.” Four people mentioned not having tickets on them when they don’t have pockets, or forgetting to give them out when they are not with them. Another person said that they do not hand them out because of a lack of time, because they are walking in the halls somewhere and do not have time to stop. A few respondents wrote that student behaviors make it difficult to hand out Bear Tickets, coins or other incentives. One wrote, “Some older students don’t care about Bear Tickets anymore.” Another person responded, “After giving the ticket, the student turns around and brags about it making another child cry.” Two other people did not seem to think it was the best strategy. One wrote, “For some kids you could hand them out all the time. Just picking a

few students when many are doing the right thing.” Another wrote “I feel like they should act a certain way without needing a reward.”

### **Survey Results Summary**

The survey respondents gave answers about their own behavior management practices and SWPBIS. Talking out of turn and student inattention were the student actions that staff felt were most disruptive in a typical week. Most staff believed that establishing classroom rules and norms, building relationships between adults and students, and creating engaging lessons and environments were the most important for establishing and maintaining desired classroom behaviors. Respondents did not rank consequences as highly as other actions to take in behavior management. Half of respondents reported that Bear Tickets were the SWPBIS intervention they were most likely to use, although nearly one-third had their own systems that they had developed.

Although respondents stated that Bear Tickets were the most commonly used incentive, the majority of respondents reported handing out 0 to 10 in a day or 0 to 25 in a week. Most respondents handed out Bear Tickets when students were demonstrating the Bear Student Expectations of “Achieve”. Many also gave out Bear Tickets when students demonstrated respect. Staff varied in reasons why they handed out Bear Tickets. Some rewarded students for doing what adults expect of them regarding rules and academic expectations, whereas others rewarded students that went above expectations. Respondents had difficulty giving out Bear Tickets and other positive incentives because of logistical reasons like they may not have pockets, or they forgot to have them on them. Some did not believe it was an effective way to motivate students.

## **Qualitative Interview Results**

I conducted qualitative interviews of staff members at this building from April of 2015 to the beginning of June 2015. My goal was to learn more about the ways staff manage behaviors and their perceptions of behavior management. Findings from the fifteen interviews of school personnel are in two sections: section one is a summarization of responses to each separate interview questions, and section two is thematic findings of open and axial codes attached to interview responses.

### **Findings by Interview Question**

There were fourteen questions on my interview guide. I asked all participants each question. Below is a summary of the responses by each question.

**Question 1.** The first question that I asked subjects was “What are the student misbehaviors that you must manage in a typical day, and which behaviors are the most disruptive or distract from learning the most?” The fifteen personnel interviewed varied in their responses, although some responses were similar in a number of the interviews.

*Student behaviors managed in a typical day.* The student behaviors that adults reported that they must manage in a typical day included blurting, disruptions, not coming into the classroom quietly, conflicts with other students, non-compliance, off-task behavior, tattle-tale behavior, physical disruptions, talking back, physical aggression, inappropriate language, non-engagement in class activities, and getting out of seats.

As shown on Table 12, the most commonly reported behavior that adults stated they had to manage in a typical day was blurting or talking out of turn. Ten out of the 15 participants said that blurting or talking out of turn was a common misbehavior. The second most frequently reported behavior to manage in a typical day was refusal/insubordination/non-compliance/off-

task actions. Eight of the 15 participants said they managed those behaviors in a typical day. The third most common response to this part of the question was that conflicts with other kids were a common behavior to manage in a typical day, as five of the participants mentioned this. Conflicts included both physical and verbal fighting.

Table 12

*Behaviors Managed in a Typical Day*

<u>Response</u>	<u>Participants(s)</u>	<u>Frequency of response</u>
Blurting or talking out of turn	1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9, 12, 15	10
Refusal/off task/non-compliance	2, 3, 6, 8, 9, 12, 13, 14	8
Conflicts with other kids	2, 4, 8, 10, 11	5
Disrespect to adults	9, 10, 11	3
Physical disruptions*	7, 12	2
Disruptions	2	1
Not coming in quiet	2	1
Tattle-taling	4	1
Upset when not getting own way	4	1
Self-control	11	1
Inappropriate language	11	1
Arguing	13	1
Interrupting class for own needs	15	1

\*Turning, spinning, getting up, crawling under desk

***Most disruptive or distract from learning the most.*** The second part of this interview question was “which behaviors are the most disruptive or distract from learning the most?” The participants provided varied responses to this portion of the question (Table 13). Six of the 15 participants named physical actions by students as the most disruptive. Three of the participants said that blurting or interrupting was the most disruptive, and four said that noncompliance was the most disruptive and distracted from learning the most.

Table 13

*Behaviors that Distract from Learning the Most*

<u>Response</u>	<u>Participants</u>	<u>Number of participants</u>
Physical things	1, 5, 6, 8, 9, 14	6
Noncompliance	3, 8, 13, 14	4
Blurting or interrupting	2, 12, 15	3
Insubordination/disrespect	6, 9	2
Trying to get others off task	9	1
Interrupting class for personal needs	15	1

**Question 2.** The second interview question I asked was, “What types of interventions do you use with students (e.g., praise, private conferences, tangible rewards, class rewards, punishments, etc.)? Why do you use these methods?” I found a couple responses that were common among several participants. Nine out of the 15 participants said that they used positive interventions with students. One positive intervention mentioned frequently was praise. Other participants talked about Bear Tickets, coins, and a classroom system for group rewards. Five participants said that they took proactive steps to alleviate the amount of negative student behaviors they had to manage. Proactive steps that participants take include actions like setting clear expectations, building relationships with kids, and giving children who have difficulties breaks or special jobs. Three participants talked about choosing different interventions for different students. They said that students have different needs and various things that motivate them, thus they may need different interventions. Table 14 is a report of all responses.

Table 14

*Interventions Used by Staff*

<u>Participant</u>	<u>Responses</u>
1	Positive interventions “Three strikes and out” “Take a break” Private conferencing Natural or logical consequences Build positive relationships between students and classroom setting
2	Praise Bear Tickets Positivity for difficult students “Take a break” and “Buddy Room”
3	Praise Building relationships Conferencing Rewards: Bear Tickets, class party or game, Chromebook time, dance parties Logical consequences
4	Praise and immediate feedback Saying “thank you” Build relationships based on trust
5	Verbal interventions: warning, “raised level” warning, then “Buddy Room” or removed from room
6	Build relationships and know students. Build relationships proactively with students at high risk for behavior issues Give choice to students when they’re stuck Distract students when stuck
7	Positive incentives chart for each student
8	Tangible rewards Praise Private conference Clear expectations Inform students of consequences: reminder, timeout, timeout in another room
9	Proactive steps Interventions depends on child Attention seeking children get positive attention and jobs Angry children get breaks Children in a power struggle makes plan to get them out of setting
10	<i>Did not answer the question</i>
11	Private and/or group conferencing
12	Redirecting Remind children rules Proactive, not reactive actions Positive reinforcement, particularly for children that are struggling with rules Reinforcing methods are Bear Slips and praise.



- |    |  |
|----|--|
| 13 | Class wide “scoreboard” system of personal positive reinforcement<br>“Take a break”<br>Bear Slips  |
| 14 | Uses classroom teachers’ class side systems, such as points or “scoreboard”<br>Praise<br>Depends on behavior, and what motivates the child<br>Instructs on difference between acceptable home and school behaviors<br>Logical consequences<br>“Firm tone of voice to let students know you are the boss”<br>Educate students on consequences for choices<br>Individual point system for positive behaviors<br>Reminders of correct behaviors and consequences for negative behaviors |
| 15 | Depends on needs of child<br>Removal from setting for conferencing<br>Positive comments<br>Proactively managing class well<br>Not giving negative behavior attention   |
- 

**Question 3.** The third interview question was, “What do you think about schoolwide behavior systems?” Each participant responded positively to schoolwide behavior plans. As one participant said: “I think they’re very powerful because then you know the students know that every adult in the building is aware of...this behavior system.” Only one participant did not believe schoolwide behavior systems could work in this setting. This person believed they were too hard to implement, and could therefore not be used effectively.

Some explained why they think schoolwide behavior systems are positive. A specialist said that they like them because they know that when they say something in class regarding expectations, it is not the first time the student has heard this expectation. This participant said that because they have limited time with students, having a schoolwide behavior system allows this participant to spend less time on behavior and expectations. This same participant believed schoolwide expectations allowed students to take their class more seriously. When this participant was able to use the same language around student behavior as used by classroom

teachers, this person felt this let the children view time with the specialist as an extension of learning time, and not just playtime.

Another participant said that there is a need for a common system in a school, and according to the data, the system is working at this school. This person said that at that point 88% of students were in Tier 1 with zero or one office referrals, believing that the system is working for the majority of students. Another participant pointed out that, at previous schools, staff were not using schoolwide behavior systems with fidelity and consistency. This person believed staff used it more consistently at this school than at other schools this participant has worked in.

Despite believing schoolwide behavior systems are a positive thing in schools and in our school, nine participants stated that this school would be better if specific conditions of these systems were improved. Many believed staff could be more consistent. One participant did not like the idea of class or group rewards, because they had seen that one student would ruin it for the entire group. Another participant said that they did not necessarily want to follow one single behavior management model, such as Responsive Classroom. This participant said there are many aspects of different programs that they find effective for behavior management, and that the most effective schoolwide behavior system is a plan that is not pre-planned, but one that is adapted to a building's unique needs. Still another participant suggested that with schoolwide behavior systems, adults do not need to follow the system if it is not consistent with the individual needs of a student. This participant cautioned that staff using a schoolwide behavior management system should still think about individual needs of students. This person suggested that "safeguards" and "procedures" need to be in place to help different types of children.

**Question 4.** The fourth interview question I asked was “Do you think teachers spend too much time dealing with behavior? Explain.” Eleven participants stated that the staff spends too much time addressing student behaviors. Two participants said that we do not spend enough time on behaviors, and two felt that staff spend as much time as they need to.

Of the eleven whom said staff spend too much time on behavior, those eleven gave various reasons for this. Four participants said one needs to spend enough time on behavior initially, so that staff and students can spend less time on it later. Others believed structures and systems in place by the school and district caused staff to spend too much time on behavior. One participant said that staff never have received adequate training in behavior management through teacher licensure programs, and thus too much time is wasted.

Over half of the participants detailed the ways that instructional time was lost to behavior management issues. One specialist, who sees most of the classes in the building, said that in some classes they do not have to deal at all with behavior. However, with other classes, it feels like behavior management takes up 50% of instructional time. Another participant said that in classrooms with more negative behaviors, a teacher might spend almost half the classroom time on behavior management. This individual has a role in the building in which they are in and out of many classrooms, and said, “I know for a fact those teachers don’t spend more than 15 or maybe even 20 minutes out of a 40 minute period teaching the class, because they’re too busy managing behaviors.”

**Question 5.** Interview question five was, “What effect does a teacher’s personality have on classroom management?” All of the participants, except one, stated that a teacher’s personality has a large influence on classroom management. Six participants said that it is

“huge.” Three said it has “a lot” to do with it. Two said, “it’s everything.” Another participant used the phrase “a big impact.”

Two of the participants, who had roles in the building in which they see most of the classrooms, said they notice the wide variety of teachers’ personalities in the building, which made it difficult for these participants to work with all of the classes. They felt like they needed to adjust to the teacher personalities for each different class, in order to be effective with each different group of students and what the students were used to expecting from their classroom teacher.

**Question 6.** “How often do you think teacher ineffectiveness at classroom management causes student misbehavior?” was the sixth interview question. All fifteen participants believed that teacher ineffectiveness was a factor in student misbehavior. Ten of the participants thought it was a major or highly significant factor. Some participants chose to quantify their answers, whereas others said that they believed this happened “a lot.” One person believed teacher ineffectiveness was the cause of student misbehavior 80% of the time, one person said 75%, and another said 60% or above. One other participant at first said that they believed it was the cause 70-80% of the time, but this person changed their mind and said it was probably the cause of 50% of instances.

**Questions 7-8.** The seventh interview question was “What influences do parents/guardians/home life have over student behavior in school?” Eight of the fifteen participants believed the students’ home lives had a negative impact on their performance in school. Four participants talked about both positive and negative influences from parents or guardians. One participant spoke positively about parents and did not say anything negative.

“Is culture a factor in students’ misbehavior, or perceived misbehavior?” was the eighth interview question. Ten participants stated that culture is a reason students do not follow behavior expectations at this school. Two people said that culture is not a factor in student misbehavior.

The responses above are a summary of what participants said in response to the prompts in questions seven and eight of the interview guide. The answers fell into larger themes, and I discuss the answers and their corresponding themes in more detail in the next section.

**Question 9.** Interview question nine was, “Is there ever a disconnect between your own philosophical belief about classroom management and interventions and what you (are able to) put into practice? Why?” Thirteen of the participants described a discrepancy between what they believed they should do and what they did. Two staff members felt no disconnect between their philosophical beliefs and what they put into practice. I discuss this topic further in the section “Findings by Core Categories.”

**Question 10.** The tenth interview question was, “How has your behavior management style changed from when you began working with students to now (If it has changed at all)?” Eleven participants described things on which they had improved or had learned since they began working with students. Two believed they had not changed, one did not answer the question, and one person believed their behavior management style had not changed for the better since working with students. I discuss this topic further in the section “Findings by Core Categories.”

**Question 11.** In response to “What could be done to improve behavior management at this school,” participants answered with a variety of suggestions, but the most common solution to school behavior management problems was that there should be more consistency. Nine

participants felt consistency was one thing that would improve behavior management at this school. Another answer that multiple participants mentioned was a plan for when one student negatively influences the entire class in a severe manner.

It is noteworthy that two participants had opposite recommendations for school improvement. One specialist said that instruction and behavior management would be better if each licensed teacher had their own space to teach and were not pushing in carts to different classrooms. This participant felt that instructional space in regular classrooms was not adequate for the curricular needs of specialist areas and there was a lack of resources that teachers and students could use when one pushes in on a cart. This person also said that specialist teachers would have better behavior management if they had a place to post their own rules and the ability to set their own classroom culture.

Another participant, who was not a specialist teacher, believed it would help behavior management if all specialists taught the younger grade levels in students' regular classrooms, rather than using a separate space for classes such as for music or media. This participant felt that the children would follow rules better if they were in their own classroom, since classroom teachers posted rules and their classroom teachers' expectations might stay present in their mind.

**Scenario 1.** I asked all participants to react to three different scenarios. In each scenario, I described a typical behavior management problem that could arise in that school, and I asked how that staff member would respond. The first scenario was, "A student is running in the hallway and collides with another student. The second student falls to the floor." Staff members had variations in how they would respond, but there were also some similarities. Fourteen of the fifteen staff interviewed talked about conferencing with the students as one intervention to

improve behavior. Thirteen staff saw this as an opportunity to teach or reteach behavior expectations.

No staff members would have given a negative consequence or punishment to the child who was running. Some of the consequences they did describe were what one might consider natural or logical consequences. One participant would have had the running student walk the first child to the nurse, another said the runner should help the child who was hurt, and a third participant would have asked the running child to demonstrate what they should have been doing instead. Some said the severity or the frequency of the child running would be a factor they looked at in determining next steps. One said that if the child ran and hit the other student on purpose, they would have to “talk to someone,” presumably administration. Another participant said they do not know if they would write it up, and it would depend if the other child were hurt. Another participant said that in this instance, they would give the child a warning, but if the child did this again the participant would believe the student does not respect rules.

Three people said that their choices about how to handle this situation would depend on who the children are, and their personalities or history with the school. Another participant said that the age of students would influence how they managed this situation. Thirteen of the 15 participants immediately mentioned checking on the hurt student. They would first attend to the needs of the child who fell, and afterwards would address the student who broke the school rules. Two of the 13 stressed that the child who broke the rules should check on the hurt student, too.

**Scenario 2.** I asked participants how they would respond to the following: “Students were instructed to complete work at their seats, but you notice that two students are in a disagreement. One child begins to cry and claims the other is using inappropriate language.” Ten participants would have clarified the situation with the students further and gathered more

information from the children. Twelve participants would have used conferencing with students as a response to this problem. Of those 12 who would have conferenced, seven spoke about it being important to either give the students privacy when they conferenced, or to not bother the rest of the class with the discussion. Six believed that the students should work this situation out together, potentially with some teacher-led discussion or not. Five participants spoke about getting focus back to the work that needed to be completed.

Only two participants mentioned a direct consequence for this action. One said he or she would separate the students so they could work. Another said the student using inappropriate language would miss “Friday Fun,” but would have an opportunity to earn it back. Three other participants said that they would give students a warning, but that there would be a consequence if it happened again. Consequences included talking to them, calling home, or moving the students to other seats.

**Scenario 3.** The third scenario I asked participants was the following:

A student refuses to complete any work assigned to them during an instructional time. He or she begins to argue with another student rather than begin work. You give the student another reminder to start work, and he/she leaves the classroom without any explanation.

Like the other scenarios, many participants would conference with the students or counsel them on their behavior. Nine participants said this would be a step they would take in this scenario. Some participants felt that as soon as the student left the room, they could not act upon it and it became an issue for administration. Eight people would immediately call the office when a child leaves the room, and five said they would get the student back in the room if they were able to. A couple of the participants who would get students back if they were able were



not classroom teachers, and do not have a full class of students for which they were responsible for supervising. One participant said this would never happen in their classroom.

As with the other scenarios, a majority of the participants did not talk about consequences. Five participants spoke about some type of consequence for a student leaving the classroom. One specialist said they would give an office referral and a phone call home, but if the student just stood outside the classroom door, this participant would just let the classroom teacher know this had happened. The other specialist interviewed said that usually would be an office referral form. Another participant said that after they called the office, there would be “additional consequences,” but this person did not elaborate on what those consequences would be. One participant described using natural or logical consequences. This participant would ask the student to come in during recess to finish any missed work when they left. This person said they might also ask the student to apologize to the class for the missed time. The other participant who spoke about a consequence said that because of the safety issues of a child leaving the classroom unsupervised, an adult should give a consequence. The consequence might be calling the principal, calling the parent, loss of recess, or lunch away from friends. The consequence would be whatever was the most effective, because this person believed this was a very serious safety problem.

### **Findings by Core Categories**

I identified three broad codes or categories from the interviews. These three broad codes are “Ways Staff Talk about Students,” “Ways Staff Talk about Colleagues and Themselves,” and “Strategies Staff Use.” There was also an overarching theme present in each of these three categories: staff at this school gave justifications or reasons for student misbehavior, and did not

hold students responsible for their behavior. I describe each of the three topics, subcategories of these topics, and the justifications of student misbehavior in the following.

**Ways staff talk about students.** I found seven subcategories about this category. They are: emotional needs of students, one or a few negatively affecting other students' education, students taking advantage, "kids will be kids," kids and home life (counteracting negative things learned at home, home life is not only factor in misbehavior, blaming parents, praising parents, negative views of home life, positive views of home life or reluctance to judge), culture, and race.

*Emotional needs of students.* All participants except for one spoke about the emotional needs of students, in relationship to following rules and expectations. Staff believed that when adults are not meeting students' emotional needs, students are not following behavior expectations. The emotional issues of students that staff talked about included anger, seeking attention, frustration over difficult work, power struggles, feeling unloved at home or at school, and over-excitement. Some also discussed psychological needs of students, and said that there are students with psychological issues that are more complicated than can be handled by regular school staff.

*Anger and over-excitement.* Five participants brought up situations when a student is angry or over-excited. When students were angry or over-excited, staff would allow children breaks, give them reminders, or work with them on calming-down methods. They did these things to calm the student, as well as to avoid a power struggle between teacher and adult.

*Frustration over difficult work.* Participants believed that children chose inappropriate behavior when they needed to complete work too difficult for them. Three participants talked about scenarios when a child may shut down because they do not understand the work. One

participant described keeping things positive with the student, and helping to build their confidence so they can get over that struggle. Two people described conferencing with the students to solve the problem.

*Seeking attention and feeling unloved at home or school.* Participants also felt students may come from homes where they are not receiving the emotional support that they need, so they are searching for it at school. According to a substitute working daily in the building: “If they’re not getting the care or the love at home... they’re going to search it out wherever they can find it. And sometimes they don’t know how to do it. And getting attention is getting attention, no matter how they do it.” This person believed there are multiple students in a class looking for attention at school, even negative attention, because of a lack of attention at home.

Another participant talked about their own negative experience with school, and the ways that shaped how they work with students. This person said: “I didn’t do good in school, because my parents didn’t really know how to encourage me. And also because...I really didn’t feel like anyone cared for me at school. I didn’t feel safe, I didn’t feel protected. And I felt overlooked, so I decided to not care about school.”

*Psychological issues.* Staff said that students come to school with emotional and psychological issues that interfere with learning and the following of rules. One participant said: “It’s a result of psychological, emotional...circumstances. So it’s no one’s choice, always. To have these negative behaviors. And they deserve someone addressing that as well, so that they can learn.”

There was also the belief by a couple participants that there is a limit to what school personnel can do to help students who have psychological issues and severe emotional problems. One teacher said that this school may or may not be the correct setting for some students.

Another described what a member of the students support services team had said. The student support services staff member told a team of teachers that our job at this school is not to fix everything with students, but to just not do more damage to the students than what they have already experienced in their lives. “To just be a model...of trust and gentleness, and try to be a soft place for students to land when they’re freaking out.”

*Too much attention on emotional needs.* Three participants were concerned that staff put too much emphasis on the emotional needs of students, at the detriment of other school goals. One participant said students take advantage of adults’ attention to emotions, as a way to avoid work or other undesired tasks. Another person stated that adults chose to waste a lot of time on kids “talking things out,” and this person did not feel this was the right message to send. Another participant believed that there was a time to address emotional needs, but that academic time was not it.

*One or a few students negatively influencing the education of their class.* Another major theme that emerged from the interviews was the phenomenon that one or more students can ruin a class session(s) or a lesson(s). More than half the participants said that they see one or a few students negatively affecting the education of the other students in the class. This happens because the negative behaviors set a poor example for other students, or these students take up much of the teacher’s time. One participant said that the biggest problem in this building was that several students with severely negative behaviors negatively affect the hundreds of other students. Because adults tolerate these students’ negative actions, many students perceive these behaviors as normal. Students who might not otherwise misbehave see these several children, and say, according to this participant, “If they’re not getting in trouble for it, and I have the same life issues that they do, then I should just do it, too.”

Participants said that some students who would not otherwise exhibit negative behaviors do so because they perceive it as accepted by adults in the classroom. The negative behaviors can become a part of the school culture. Adults in the building spoke about trying to stop this cycle, but they also spoke of multiple barriers that make it difficult to curb the most challenging student behaviors. One teacher said that it could take half a year to figure out how best to manage one student who is extremely disruptive. Another teacher said that if just one or two children in a classroom were extremely disruptive, it would be manageable. However, in many classrooms there are three or four students who severely hinder the learning of others. This teacher said that there is not a place in the building to house all of the students who exhibit extremely unacceptable behaviors. It is a part of the culture and general procedures of the school that teachers in the classroom manage these.

The extremely negative behaviors and the lack of feasible solutions to handle this cause harm to the educational experiences of the others in the classroom. One teacher said: "I feel bad when...kids... have hijacked the class and taken it over...because you can see the rest of the class getting frustrated...and you can see the see the negativity in the rest of the class."

Other participants said students making the right choices are missing things, such as educational time, attention from staff, and the ability to have a positive classroom environment, and that this is not fair to those students. While discussing other themes, eight participants said that because of the need to manage negative behaviors, there is a loss of teaching time. Eleven participants, when asked if staff spend too much time handling behaviors, said yes. Conversely, one participant said that as educators we also have a responsibility to the students who are behaving negatively. While it is not fair that they are wasting other students' time, it is also not fair to them if teachers do not meet their behavioral and educational needs.

Some participants suggested solutions to this problem. One said that there should be “more things in place,” and a more strict line drawn between acceptable and unacceptable behaviors. Another participant thought there should be more early interventions to target the students who behave the most negatively. Two participants thought that teachers should remove students from the classroom more often or there should be an easier way to remove them. One of those same participants had a second solution: assign students to classrooms differently and place the students with the most challenging behaviors in the same classroom. This way these students would not waste the time of students who are consistently making good behavioral choices. Classroom teachers could take turns having a year with the most challenging behaviors. The participant also admitted that this solution could be controversial and would likely never happen.

***Students taking advantage.*** Four participants talked about students taking advantage of certain circumstances or of an adult. Two participants mentioned this phenomenon twice. Staff described students misbehaving in order to get out of an undesired setting, children choosing to misbehave because others in their class were, students taking advantage of staff less skilled in behavior management, children using downtime when a teacher prepares to get into trouble, and children recognizing and playing the personalities of their teachers.

***“Kids will be kids.”*** Three participants stated that “kids will be kids,” or that they can attribute some negative behavior to the natural tendencies of children. One participant said that because of their young age, they need reminders and they might behave impulsively. Another participant thought that most adult expectations of children were unreasonable. This person thought that some adults forget that they are children, and should not treat them as they would an adult peer.

*Kids and home life.* One interview question was “What influences do parents/guardians/home life have over student behavior in school?” Every participant answered this question. Their responses addressed several different themes: whether or not home life was positive or negative, blaming or praising parents, counteracting negative things learned at home, and home life is not the only factor in misbehavior.

*Negative and positive views of home life.* Most participants understood this question about the influences of home life to mean ‘what negative influences.’ Twelve participants responded by describing negative factors from students’ home lives. Four of those 10 also talked about positive aspects of students’ home lives, and acknowledged that student home lives might be either positive or negative influences. One person described parents as loving and wanting the best for their children, but thought parents might not have the knowledge or ability to influence them positively. Only one participant talked about the influences of home life in only positive ways.

*Blaming parents and praising parents.* Participants believed that students might not be following rules and expectations at school because parents and guardians have not taught them to follow rules at home. Some participants placed blame or responsibility on parents or guardians for negative student behavior. They said things such as “not getting the care or the love at home...they’re going to search it out...” Another said: “some people might grow up in a culture where no one really cares, and you just kind of fend for yourself.” One participant spoke about their experience with the community, and said:

You know, I have a lot of family members who are single mothers. And out of 10 of them that I could name, only one of them has been successful. The rest of them have leaned on the system to do everything for them. Some of them were talking about moving

to Minnesota because our system is so much better than Chicago's system, and they were moving here just for that... I told them about the educational things that they could do here, and how they could improve themselves. But they didn't want to hear any of that. So when you have a culture where people, maybe, think that that is the only way to live—I think that kind of breeds despair, you know, and lack of hope. And when you have those things and you don't see yourself being able to go anywhere, how do you teach your children to go anywhere, to do something positive?

No participants had specific positive things to say about the parents of the students at this school. One person said that they hoped home life had an influence on student behavior in school, meaning they hoped the positive influences at home would transfer to school. Another participant talked about culture and home life, and said that perceived misbehavior may be the result of the culture in the home, but that “in nobody's family are they going to say...you are allowed to be rude, disrespectful, and misbehave.” This person did not believe that parents or guardians promoted or deliberately encouraged their children to be disrespectful or break rules, but that children did these things because of other factors such cultural values differing from school expectations.

*Counteracting negative things learned at home.* Three participants said that there is a need to correct negative things that students learn at home. One participant said, “I got to interact with the parents, and see what kind of interaction the parents had with the children. I think... the biggest thing is a lot of the parents are not teaching their children how to be respectful to adults.” Another participant said the following about the students: “They see behaviors from their parents, and they think to themselves well, this is my mom, you know, the one person that I love and adore the most, and this is the way that they're interacting with adults so that must be the



appropriate way to interact with adults.” One person believed that it could be difficult for students to sit down and complete work when they need to because at home they can do whatever they want, and so they struggle with different expectations at school.

*Home life is not the only factor in misbehavior.* Other participants were reluctant to attribute misbehavior in the classroom to a child’s home life. Four people said that there are other factors. One participant said, “I also know it’s not the only factor, because there are students that have very high expectations at home...because when you call home it’s a big deal,” describing what happens when they call home about negative behaviors in class. Another participant said, “I think it plays a big part, but it also is not everything...a kid can have a rough home life and still come to school and be successful...and have respect.” One person cautioned against putting too much of a connection on a child’s home life and the way they behave or perform in school. This person was afraid that if staff believe a student will do poorly because of unfortunate home circumstances, they will create lower expectations for students, and students will not do as well, therefore, when they would be capable of better performance. This participant said:

It’s all kind of like a mixture of home life, but also how you treat them in the classroom...not thinking...’oh I know your own life is kind of rough, so I know you’re going to be a bad kid so I’m going to treat you that way’...making a self-fulfilled prophecy. But instead, treating them like anybody else and giving them the respect that a child deserves, so that hopefully they can give you the respect that you as an adult deserve, and then maybe even being that person that helps them realize that they’re worth more and have the ability to be a good kid, and be a good person, and be a good human. As opposed to...following in sad footsteps.

**Culture.** According to 10 participants, culture is a factor in student misbehavior or perceived misbehavior. Only two participants did not feel culture was a factor at all. The participants did not all define or describe culture as the same thing. Four referred to students' race as culture. Three referred to culture as the country of birth or parent's birth. Four talked about culture in terms of the values within each home. According to Merriam-Webster (n.d.), culture is "the beliefs, customs, arts, etc., of a particular society, group, place, or time." All participants responded with an accurate understanding of what culture is, yet they talked about different aspects of it.

**Race.** During the interviews, five different participants brought up the topic of race. Four participants mentioned race when I asked a question about the relationship between culture and student behavior. One participant brought up race in response to other questions and prompts. Four of the five people who mentioned race believed it is a factor in student behavior or perceived misbehavior. One person, however, stated that race is not a factor in student misbehavior or perceived misbehavior.

Two of the people who brought up race talked about it in some depth. The individual who talked about race, outside of the question about culture, spoke of it as a different culture. This person talked about being Black and feeling uncared for by White teachers. This participant felt that teachers here are caring towards Black students, but that they do not truly understand what students are going through as part of the Black urban culture. This person believed that there are personality clashes between teacher and students because non-Black teachers have no idea how to empathize with students' lives, as they are not aware of the unfortunate circumstances some students have. This participant recommended more support for students and families to help with this.

The other person who talked about race in a more detailed way described statistics at our school of Black students versus other races.

Well the kids that are referred [for behavioral issues] are Black boys...here the percentage of African American students in our building is like 42%, but their referrals are over 80%. And that's the only racial group that is reversed like that. So I think it's a cultural mismatch in our building with majority White middle-class culture working with 42% Black and 80%, whatever kids of color. So obviously, there are cultural differences across the board behaviorally, in all different aspects. Not that we aren't making improvements in working on our cultural relevance...So I think we're definitely moving in the right direction. I think people have the heart and all that.

This participant continued to suggest that there is something going on, however, in the actions or reactions of adults in the building:

I can't believe that just Black students are troublemakers. I mean if you look at the data, that's what it almost shows. So there's something going on there... I think it's the cultural...piece...just things that are accepted in other cultures aren't accepted in school culture, which happens to be the culture that the majority of the people here know and grew up in and follow...I'm sure parents --like you hear parents talk about on how to interact...Black families talk about how to interact with police, right? How do you, what do you do differently? So I think that's a cultural thing that families talk about. And I think that there is some of that with the school too. Like, how do you interact with the school and, then, some history of those folks maybe not being successful in school, or having a bad experience with school. So feeling that and then bringing that attitude on to

their kid a little bit. I'm not saying it's just the school. I'm saying there is some ownership in those families also. But we can't blame the parents.

***Summary of ways staff talk about students.*** When staff talked about students, they identified the most problematic student behaviors and their preferred methods for managing behaviors. Most considered behavior management to take up too much time in school, and they were concerned when this happened because one or a few students repeatedly wasted instructional time.

Participants attributed negative student behaviors primarily to mistakes or actions taken by teachers or staff. Many felt home life and culture had a negative influence as well. They also felt that students who do not have their emotional needs met are likely to misbehave. Most participants felt that more consistency would improve student behavior. There was very little discussion about consequences for negative behaviors.

***Ways staff talk about colleagues and themselves.*** I identified three sub-themes about how staff talk about colleagues and themselves: "perceptions of colleagues," "perceptions of themselves," and "ultimate responsibility is with teachers."

***Perceptions of colleagues.*** Staff had both negative and positive things to say about colleagues and themselves regarding behavior management. More participants had negative things to say or criticisms of others and themselves. Only three people did not speak negatively about colleagues. One participant praised colleagues and made excuses for them. Most of the participants who were critical found colleagues too strict or too loose, or they criticized colleagues for not using best practices for instruction and behavior management. They also criticized other staff for not being responsive to student needs, for not being consistent, and for not managing administrative or structural issues well.

*Too strict versus too loose.* Nine participants talked about colleagues who were too strict or too loose. Four people thought there are individuals in the school who are too strict with students. One described it as behaving too “harshly” with children, and that that style does not work for many students. Another said that when a teacher is too strict, students would rebel. One was concerned that students who spend an entire year with an overly strict teacher will not adjust well the following year, and may not do well when they need to have a substitute teacher. This person communicated concern that when a class is too tightly controlled, the students will struggle with adults who are looser in classroom management.

Seven participants described ways that they felt their colleagues were too loose with behavior management. Some mentioned that those who are not as strict would have more problems in their classrooms. One said that children would take advantage of a teacher being more relaxed with behavior management. Another participant said that some teachers are simply more “laid back” in nature, and not as bothered by “chaos” as they would be. A classroom teacher said that other teachers are not stopping children when they see a behavior that is not acceptable. This person expressed frustration over this. Another participant thought the reason some adults were too loose with behavior management was that they did not want to tell children ‘no.’ This participant felt staff were afraid to say no, which would then result in undesired behaviors getting worse before they would get better. This person felt it took time for a child to understand that the adult truly meant ‘no.’ This participant cautioned that when trying to help students learn more desirable actions, behaviors would initially get worse before they improve.

Participants were concerned with both a lack of adherence to rules and a lack of caring in terms of behavior management. Two people acknowledged that both adults who are too strict and adults who are too loose could be a problem. They felt that those who are too loose with

behavior management have more problems because students will see that rules are not enforced. Yet, when a teacher is more like a “drill sergeant,” the students may perceive it as a lack of caring, which will result in further negative behaviors.

*Not using best practices.* Participants also criticized their colleagues by explaining that they do not always use best practices in instruction and behavior management. Nine people described various examples of this. Some talked about colleagues not spending enough time teaching expected behaviors, did not spend enough time at the beginning of the year doing this, or lacked organization in the way that they managed behaviors. Some said that the methods other staff used were not the best. One person thought some people were too “old school” and were punitive rather than using natural and logical consequences. Another person commented that their team did things that were contrary to Responsive Classroom principles.

*Not responsive to student needs.* Seven participants described ways their colleagues were not responsive to student needs. One participant expressed disappointment that students did well in their class, but they would see them struggle the next year with other teachers. This person seemed to believe there were things they were doing that were meeting students’ needs that other teachers were not doing. One participant thought teachers give too much attention to negative behaviors, and do not give students enough praise. Another, similarly, thought that some staff unjustly label specific students as behavior problems. This participant believed teachers put too much attention on these students’ negative behaviors. This person thought it would be more effective to let some behaviors resolve themselves. Another participant said that teachers state publicly, in front of students and their peers, that they do not want to work with certain kids, and thus were not meeting students’ emotional needs of belonging and acceptance. Two participants

felt that some staff at the school did not address the needs of non-White students living in poverty.

*Consistency.* Three participants blamed colleagues for a lack of consistency regarding management of student behaviors. All participants, however, brought up the importance of consistency. Some criticized themselves and some said the school, in general, needs more consistency. There was not a consensus as to what consistency meant. Some described it as teachers making fair decisions regardless of whom the student was or teachers setting the mood of the classroom. Others talked about consistency between teachers. For example, are all members of the fourth-grade team explaining and enforcing rules the same way? Do all adults in the building have the same expectations for hallway behavior and have the same consequences for misbehaviors?

*Structural and administrative issues.* Three participants expressed criticisms of colleagues about either structural or administrative issues. One participant thought that a colleague was not effective in teaching in a shared space. Had they not had to share space, this would not have been an issue. Another participant felt there was a lack of communication between the “behavior team,” as this person referred to it, and teachers. A third participant believed there was an administrative issue because there was not a practical place to bring children with severely negative behavior issues who stopped the learning in class. This person acknowledged that administration’s job in managing this was difficult, but administrators could do more so students demonstrating the most severe of behaviors did not negatively affect the rest the class.

*Reluctance to criticize colleagues.* Eight participants said they could not state anything that their colleagues could do better and, if they did criticize, were quick to qualify it with a

reason. Three of those eight participants said that they were not sure what colleagues could improve upon because they are not in others' classrooms on a regular basis. They still gave suggestions despite stating that, however. One participant said negative things about colleagues, but then said, after the critical response, that staff in the building were heading in the correct direction and were putting in effort. A new staff member said they could not criticize colleagues, as they did not feel qualified to answer due to inexperience. Yet another participant said that they did not have any suggestions as to how to improve the school, as they were "just a complainer." This participant did suggest, however, that some of the choices made by colleagues could be because of generational differences. This participant believed that differences in generational groups might be the reason adults handle behavior management issues differently. This person did not approve of the primary practice that some younger team members put on talking through every small student problem. This participant said this was likely because of characteristics of that generation. This person seemed to think it was a positive thing to have diversity in ages of staff, so that students can get different needs met by different styles of educators.

*Empathy for colleagues.* Three participants expressed empathy for the job situations of coworkers. One administrator expressed empathy for colleagues who seemed burned out handling students with a very high frequency of behavior issues. A specialist teacher explained that they sympathize with classroom teachers, as they need to deal with a problem behavior in a student all day long, and specialists only see students for 30 minutes at a time. In turn, a staff member who works in the classroom all day, sympathized with specialists, explaining classroom teachers are more effective in dealing with students because of deeper relationships with students, and specialists, because they see so many students and do not see them for as much time, have a difficult task building relationships with students.



*Praise of colleagues.* Participants did not praise their colleagues very much. Whereas all but three participants were critical of others, eight participants talked about positive things colleagues were doing with behavior management. Furthermore, during the interviews there were 34 criticisms made about colleagues, while only nine times did people say positive things about the behavior management practices of their colleagues.

The eight people who did talk about things that were going well all had different responses. Some expressed general compliments for the staff as a whole. One said, “everyone’s doing what they know to do.” Another person said, “[in] our building I would say the majority of teachers have very high classroom management skills.” One specialist teacher thought all do a good job of trying a variety of strategies to help students. Another non-classroom teacher praised classroom teachers, saying teachers are good at communicating and implementing expectations with the large group of kids in a typical classroom setting, which is a rare skill.

Other compliments were more specific. One participant thought the school stood out from others in that the school provides help and support for students’ mental issues and family issues. Another participant, who had been in the school between five and 10 years, said that students are less cliquish compared to when this participant began working at the school and thinks students are more likely to hang out with different groups. Things like Pride Assemblies and the work of the PBIS coordinator have helped with this.

Three participants talked about the work of colleagues who had a positive impact on their own work with students. One participant learned a lot from watching colleagues and adopts effective things colleagues do. Another person learned from a colleague that if you make a mistake with a student, you should apologize. The third person talked about a colleague who appeared to have great behavior management skills because whenever they observed this teacher

and the class, students were on task. The participant felt this teacher knew what works with that group of students. The participant also noticed the teacher listens to and will try some new strategies, but does not throw away the things that they know will work in favor of an educational fad or trend.

***Perceptions of themselves.*** Participants were more likely to talk about colleagues than about themselves, and they were more likely to be critical of themselves than make positive remarks. Eight participants made critical comments about their own behavior management skills or steps they had taken. Five participants talked about things they did well regarding behavior management.

***Criticisms of oneself.*** Criticisms of oneself came up in interviews half as often as criticisms of colleagues. Of the eight people who said negative things about themselves, half of them made multiple critical remarks about their own practices. Those who criticized themselves rationalized or gave reasons for it.

These criticisms varied. One participant thought they were too nice sometimes, whereas another told me that they were too strict and needed to loosen up. One participant admitted they needed to be more consistent with using building procedures for consequences. A new educator said they felt they should let more behaviors go and sort themselves out, yet sometimes felt “conditioned” to act on certain behaviors and wished they did not do this. Another participant described a behavior management system used by their team, and admitted that it was quite complex and did not follow Responsive Classroom principles. This person seemed to feel that they were not fulfilling part of their job duties by using a system that was contrary to Responsive Classroom.

The participants who shared criticisms of their own behavior all justified what they did, or found an explanation for it. The participant who talked about not using principles of Responsive Classroom very frequently was quick to point out that it was not just them, and it was the whole team. People talked about situations, such as time of day or year, which made them less likely to manage behavior well. Participants seemed concerned with the well-being of students and with doing their job well, and when they talked about mistakes they made they attributed it to stresses or other factors outside themselves. No participants expressed apathy or lack of concern.

Another thing that participants had in common when criticizing themselves is that the majority of them reported a discrepancy or disconnect between what they knew they should be doing and what they actually did. They described several reasons they did not handle situations the way they knew they should: it is near the end of the year and they are tired, they are new to the profession and still learning many things, they are stressed because of other problems in the classroom and not able to focus on this goal, they are unprepared that day or not “on the ball,” their mood is off, or they are stuck in a rut and need to be reminded about how they actually want to manage behaviors. Several of these participants also had plans they had in place for themselves to improve. For example, one participant admitted forgetting to praise students some days and found that students misbehaved more frequently on those days. This participant started wearing Bear Tickets in a name badge around their neck so they were always there as a reminder to say positive things to students.

Two participants, in particular, were very candid about their own mistakes in behavior management. One of these was a new teacher who had been in the profession less than a year, and the other one had taught for over 10 years. Both took an analytic view of their own practices.

They described several situations they had been in, what they felt they did wrong, what they should have done, and what they were going to do in the future to make it better.

The new teacher, a specialist, sees multiple groups of kids in a day and said that some classes were more difficult than other classes. This person admitted that they did not look forward to seeing some classes. One of this person's main goals with students was to create a fun, positive atmosphere, but sometimes gets overwhelmed while teaching, and focuses too much on negative behaviors of students. This participant realized this is ineffective as well as contrary to their philosophy of teaching. When realizing this, this participant reevaluates their behaviors, and asks if current actions are producing desired results. This person talks to other teachers and gets opinions from other people in order to manage challenging student behavior issues.

The more experienced teacher opened up about personal faults, as well as situations that make behavior management not go as well as they would like. This participant admitted they are not a patient person, and do not have the best reactions to misbehavior. This participant felt they spend too much time on behaviors, as some of the content in their subject area is "boring." This person also talked about struggling with the last five minutes of the day and keeping students listening and engaged. Each time this person mentioned a weakness in behavior management, they also talked about what they are currently doing or planning to do to improve this in the future. Because this participant believes they are not patient, they try to make sure they organize well, which helps with patience. This participant looked for ways to make some of the less interesting curriculum more engaging, and planned to implement new lessons. As for the engagement at the end of the day, the participant tried many different strategies to deal with this.

*Praise for oneself.* Five participants talked about successes they had with behavior management. Two of those five talked about positive things about their own management several times. Participants were far more likely to criticize themselves than to praise themselves. One participant said that they felt confident in their ability to redirect negative behaviors, which helped to make students non-confrontational with them. Another participant said that their students are respectful to all adults, and are very honest with this participant. When asked about a behavior scenario in which a student walks out of the classroom without permission, this participant's response was that it would never get to that level of behavior in their classroom. One participant said that they have effective behavior expectations because the expectations are simple and that they are good at catching behaviors before they become a problem. Another person said the administration hired them at this school because someone believed they would have a talent for dealing with students with behavior issues, and this person said it turned out to be true.

Some of the praise that participants gave themselves was, at the same time, a criticism of others. When a participant said students were not confrontational with them, one might interpret this to mean they believe students are confrontational to others. Another participant said students acted well for them, and one might infer that they did not behave well for others. A third person said they put in a lot of effort with a student and that not everyone was willing to do that. Another participant said that they are able to recognize when students are doing something because it is a characteristic of the students' culture, not a negative behavior choice and not everyone is able to recognize that.

*Disconnect between philosophy and things staff can put into practice.* When asked "Is there ever a disconnect between your own philosophical belief about classroom management and

interventions and what you (are able to) put into practice,” 13 participants believed there was a discrepancy, and two did not share a discrepancy. One person responded “Not yet,” and then moved onto the next interview question. Another provided a strong response to this question. This participant said: “I don’t necessarily think so. I think I’m able to stay pretty true to what I believe in here, in the classroom. I think if you weren’t...you would have a really hard time of it, I would think.” This participant believed that a person who experienced a discrepancy between philosophy and practice would have a difficult time working in the building.

Yet, 13 of the participants did express this issue. Whereas one teacher felt philosophical conflicts would make a job too difficult, other participants had learned to accept it as a normal part of every day. One participant said, “This one makes me laugh. Of course. All day long.” It appears that the majority of participants were accustomed to feeling this on a very regular basis, as the types of philosophical disconnects they talked about were things that often happened regularly.

Being busy, being new in a position, or being overwhelmed with the job were listed as causes of philosophical disconnect. One participant wanted to implement a more comprehensive behavior management plan in their classroom, but because of being new to this school, had a very busy year. Another new teacher reported becoming lost with the many things going on, and overwhelmed. One participant, also new to the profession, said they wanted to implement many things from college education courses, but was not able to because of the workload during the school year due to testing. An experienced teacher explained that they start each day intending to do various things, but things come up and it becomes like “whack-a-mole,” or “putting out fires,” and so this teacher did not have the opportunity to do everything intended. Another experienced

participant shared that when they were unprepared they did not always act in ways that matched their philosophical beliefs regarding teaching.

Some of the things that caused them philosophical disconnects were things that were outside of participant's control. One classroom teacher wished to manage the behavior of not just their current students, but of others, including in their classes from previous years. This participant wanted to know more about what was going on with them, and why they misbehaved when they had not done so in the past. Another person said they feel a conflict when students who are disruptive and stop the class must remain in the class, rather than go to a temporary alternate setting. A staff member felt conflicted when working with a student who had special needs, but had very limited information about that student due to data privacy laws. This participant felt they could have helped that student more they had the ability to see the child's Individualized Education Program (IEP).

When participants talked about philosophical disconnects, some of their responses contradicted another. One participant felt other staff members were too "old school" or punitive when it came to behavior. This participant said that they preferred to be more proactive and use natural consequences. Another participant sometimes forgets everything they know about interventions and uses more "old school" methods. This participant talked further about being more "old school" and asserting authority over students, and this person was clear that there are times it is necessary to do so.

Participants expressed differing opinions about the use of Responsive Classroom. One new teacher felt they could not use as much of the Responsive Classroom elements as they would like. A more experienced teacher felt colleagues used too much Responsive Classroom, which was not in accord with their own philosophies of behavior management.

Two participants perceived colleagues as being too permissive. One participant believes colleagues enable students, and they do not believe in enabling. This person said that unless there is a recent death, teachers should expect students to participate and follow school expectations.

This participant explained this further by saying:

I actually call it the missionary syndrome... I have seen it happen in my place of work, I'm not even going to say which place, where there was a kid who was having problems at home, and then the first day everyone's all 'are you okay?' Okay, that was fine. You got one day. And three months later, the same kid is...not going to learn. And I... can't handle that. I don't agree with that.

Another participant was concerned that, when colleagues are too permissive, it may result in negative consequences for students outside of school, or later in life. This person did not believe that being permissive was compassionate, and felt overly permissive behavior by staff would eventually hurt students:

I don't think we're doing these kids any favors by not saying no to them. They need to be told no, every once in a while. If we constantly give them their way, the behaviors are only going to escalate--they're only going to get worse. We're sending a message to the students, by not saying no to the students, that their behavior is acceptable. Because I'll tell you what---if a student is out into the community, and for example, they're on a bus, and they get into an altercation with someone who's riding the bus, and the cops have to get involved, I can tell you what—the first thing that the cop, the first thing that the cop is not going to think, is 'this person is, has an EBD disability. I need to take it easy on them.'



This participant felt that some adults in the building are not preparing some students to be successful citizens in the community. This person believed that by providing a setting at school where students are used to hearing “no,” they would be better prepared to handle negative encounters that could happen in the community outside of school. Both this participant and the participant who spoke about “missionary syndrome” felt that adults in this school who believe they are being nice to students do not recognize they could be setting them up for failure later in life. They acknowledged that colleagues who are attempting to demonstrate care for students actually do not have high enough expectations for students.

*Change in behavior management styles throughout careers.* When I asked, “How has your behavior management style changed from when you began working with students to now? (if it has changed at all)” most participants described specific ways their behavior management practices had changed since they began working with students. Two people did not believe they changed, and one did not answer this question.

Eleven participants talked about ways their behavior management practices had improved. One said there had been a change, but it was not a positive one. This new educator said they were now more likely to lose track of teaching goals and become overwhelmed. Four of the 11 participants said that one thing that has changed for the better since they began working with students is that they are now more proactive. Four other participants thought they now had more tools or strategies to manage behavior, including Responsive Classroom and SWPBIS.

Participants also talked about changing how strict or loose they were with behavior management. One participant does not write up more minor behavior infractions anymore, but instead finds other ways to handle them. This participant reported changing this because writing a student up had become more work and more difficult to do. Another person said that when they

began working with students, they used to let some things go. This participant now is more firm and consistent with expectations and consequences, as they see this as being best for students.

A few participants talked about personal revelations they had about themselves, or changes in the way they view the nature of education. A participant who had worked for less than five years said they learned to have more confidence in behavior management decisions, and to have personal trust. A participant who had taught for less than two years said that they began teaching just wanting to love all the students so much and to be their good friends, but learned that students need them to be a teacher, not a best friend. A third participant had a revelation about their preconception of students in school. When this person began working with students, they assumed all families had given guidelines for acceptable behavior to students, as this person had done for their own child. This participant learned that was not universally true and that with some students this person needed to start from scratch.

Six participants talked about students' socio-emotional needs and their own changes since they began working with students. Except for the participant who said they needed to focus more on being an instructor than a friend, the other five all said they had learned to pay more attention to relationships or socio-emotional needs of students. One said that they now listen more to students and truly try to hear students' points of view. Another realized they need to explain reasons behind behavior expectations to students. This participant no longer just tells students how they must behave, but now looks at behavior management as a learning process for students that a teacher guides them through. Another participant has learned to have more "finesse" with students, by being culturally sensitive to them and by using culturally appropriate language with them, or by speaking in a student's home language when appropriate.

***Ultimate responsibility is with teachers.*** When participants talked about perceptions of themselves and colleagues, they mentioned the same thing many times. Seven participants stated that the ultimate responsibility for student behavior at school is with the teachers. When I asked, “How often do you think teacher ineffectiveness at classroom management causes student misbehavior,” everyone said that teacher ineffectiveness was a cause of student misbehavior. All seemed to believe that if they or their colleagues changed or altered something in their behavior management practices, students would follow more expectations.

Participants spoke about the need to model an appropriate tone or mood in the classroom. Other staff explained that despite what children experience at home, school personnel are responsible for whether or not students follow school expectations. Others believe the staff’s responsibility is to build a bridge to help make positive connections between families of non-dominant cultures and races and the school.

The question about teachers’ personality prompted three people to talk about this, indicating a need to be aware of one’s own personality traits to work effectively with kids.

I think it’s more of knowing what your personality is, and being able to gear your personality to being able to take care of your students. Because students come in, unaware of your personality, and you’re unaware of theirs, so you have to learn how to deal with different personalities...you have to learn how to work with your personality...

Others spoke about the need to model and set an appropriate tone or mood in the classroom, because students will copy your lead. For example, if a teacher is angry, the class is going to be angry. Students will mirror the attitude and mood that they see from the teacher. One participant said,

You know, you can raise your voice and you can do stuff, but if you're mad the whole time, the kids will be mad the whole time....So your attitude—they're just like sponges, they just absorb it. That's what I've noticed... You see it when you see a teacher is getting escalated. I've done it myself, too. When it gets escalated, the whole room gets escalated. Somebody has to bring it down. It should be the adult. 'Cause the kids are not going to generally do it on their own.

When discussing students' home lives, staff said they have the ultimate responsibility for behavior in the classroom. Staff believed that no matter what happens at school, teachers at school are ultimately responsible for teaching children to follow the expectations at school. One adult went as far to say that we cannot hold parents responsible for what happens at school, as we do not expect parents to blame us for things that happen at home.

***Summary of ways staff talk about colleagues and themselves.*** Participants spoke about others more than they spoke about themselves. They were also more likely to criticize others' behavior management actions or actions they had taken, than to say positive things. Participants believed colleagues were either too strict or too permissive, did not always use best practices, were not meeting emotional or cultural needs of students, and were not consistent. When participants talked about their own faults or mistakes in behavior management, they often blamed it on stress or being too busy. Participants believed that the actions they and their colleagues took regarding behavior management were the most important factor in how students behaved in the classroom.

**Strategies Staff Use.** Throughout the interviews, participants brought up many strategies that they believe promote effective behavior management. Multiple participants mentioned the same several strategies. There were also a couple strategies mentioned by just one or two

participants. One strategy brought up by two participants was the setup of a classroom. Two participants stated that the way the room was physically organized has an effect on classroom behavior. A second strategy that two participants mentioned was giving students a chance to fix mistakes. One person mentioned the term “immediacy” as a strategy. This referred to responding promptly to student needs.

The strategies that were mentioned by multiple participants included proactive steps (including teaching behaviors explicitly and building relationships), consistency, positivity and positive interventions, picking battles, raising voice or changing tone, reference to current and best practice initiatives, recognizing individual needs or differentiation, and bringing focus back to academics and instruction.

***Proactive steps.*** Ten participants talked about being proactive with behavior management. As one participant stated, it’s a different viewpoint---not just reacting to negative behavior, but also thinking about how to prevent it. Despite participants believing proactivity was important, the term proactive seemed to mean different things to different people. Ten talked about pre-teaching or used the term proactive as a synonym to pre-teaching. For some, proactive was just about having a well-organized classroom. So, one would be proactive if they were doing their job and shared rules with students. Many participants saw being proactive as doing one or both of the following things: building relationships and teaching behaviors explicitly.

***Building relationships.*** Participants believed building relationships was a proactive step—so that if or when a student struggles, that relationship was already in place and the hope is that the student would respond in a more positive way. Participants saw building relationships as having other benefits to students. Not only was it seen as a proactive first step in order to stop negative behaviors, it was described as a source of motivation for students who would want to

work for someone they knew cared about them. Participants also felt it was necessary for students to have positive relationships with staff members particularly when they may be experiencing difficulties in their home lives.

None of my interview questions were about relationships with students, yet every participant brought it up on their own. Some used synonyms for the word “relationship,” or they described things that they do that were synonymous with relationship building. For example, two teachers talked about joking around with children, and letting them see their sense of humor and appreciate the children’s humor. Three talked about being positive with students. One talked about the need to know the students well, in order to work with them. Synonyms for relationship included: “connection,” “trust,” “heart,” “care,” “love,” “close,” “likes,” “do good for them,” “real one on one contact,” “understand them,” “on their side,” “personable,” “being in touch,” “get to know,” “on your side,” “rapport,” and “respect.”

Participants all believed building relationships was a crucial part of behavior management. However, staff did not seem to have one common set of ideas about what it means to build a relationship with students. A few participants said that building relationships was important, but they did not elaborate on what it meant to build a relationship. One described it as “getting the kids on your side.” Another participant believed it meant the students have a positive relationship with the subject area of the teacher, and that the teacher can accomplish this by having positive interactions with the students. One intermediate teacher talked about relationships as “finding out what’s happening in their world, talking to them about when they’re doing a good thing.” To this participant, building relationships was both listening to them and giving them positive feedback on school related things.

Another step that participants talked about related to relationship building was using conferencing with students. When participants described how they would handle hypothetical behavior scenarios, over half said for each scenario that they would conference with students. Participants saw the importance of letting students share their side of the story, and participants made the effort to allow students to do that.

While not every participant used the word “proactive” when talking about building relationships and some had slightly different definitions of what it meant to build relationships, every participant stressed the importance of positive relationships with their students. Although they may not all recognize it as something that can proactively stop negative student behavior, all participants reported working towards building relationships, and they saw other direct benefits from relationship building.

*Teaching behaviors explicitly.* Teaching behaviors explicitly was another proactive step that participants found crucial to effective behavior management. Every participant except one talked about this, though some did not specifically name it as a proactive step. Four participants felt that other staff members run into trouble with behavior management because they do not take the time in the beginning to teach and reteach expectations. They felt that if staff spend more time on behavior early on and even put an emphasis on behavior rather than academics in the beginning of the year, that they would then spend less time on behavior later.

Most participants believe that students will not enter school already knowing how to behave in the school setting. When I asked questions about the influence of home life and the influence of culture on student behaviors, seven participants responded by saying students need to be taught school rules, and that expectations in the students’ homes and cultures are not the same as school expectations.

Every participant except for two, while describing what they would do during the three scenarios I presented, talked about using students' misbehaviors as an opportunity to teach or reteach expectations. They also said they would hope that the situation might not be as bad because they would have already taught behavior expectations with the kids.

Participants considered teaching behaviors explicitly as one proactive step in effective behavior management. At this school, teaching behaviors explicitly is such a part of the regular routines and expectations in working with students that every participant except for one talked about teaching behaviors.

***Consistency.*** Every single participant talked about consistency as an important component in behavior management. Some talked about negative effects when there is not enough consistency in the school building. When I asked what could be done to improve behavior management at this school, nine participants said that their needs to be consistency. One participant said that when their team is not consistent with their expectations, students recognize this and play the teachers off one another. Four participants said that when they were not consistent in their own actions, their behavior management was not as effective.

Participants also discussed consistency as a benefit of schoolwide behavior systems. Participants believed that consistency was a beneficial by-product of schoolwide systems. Others believed that schoolwide systems were a positive thing in schools, as long as everyone was consistent. One participant said that in order for schools to have consistency and schoolwide expectations there needs to be effective communication amongst staff.

***Positive interventions and positivity.*** Twelve participants talked about the need for positivity when working with students. When I asked about types of interventions they use with students, nine said they used positive interventions, and a type of positive intervention mentioned



frequently was praise. Five participants also talked about the need for positivity particularly when dealing with students that have challenging negative behaviors.

Staff talked about the need for positivity, but they also talked about the need not to be negative. They stated that it might be ineffective to behave too harshly, or like a “drill sergeant” with students. Two participants mentioned they notice their time with students does not go as well when they forget to be positive with students. They make a point to remind themselves to look for the positives in students and to keep things light with them.

***Picking battles.*** Similar to the idea of positivity with students is the concept that staff might “pick battles.” Some participants felt that they would rather keep the class atmosphere and relationships with students more positive, and so they limited which negative behaviors they would address with students. One teacher described this as “keep teaching,” despite student verbal interruptions. This teacher found it difficult to do so, but it was a part of the teacher’s plan to attempt to do this. Another staff member felt that when working in small groups with children, the best choice to keep the learning going was to ignore some misbehavior. If misbehaviors got too severe, another adult in the room would step in. Another participant identified the difference between behaviors that staff should ignore, and those that staff need to address. This participant said that if a student was making a bad choice in terms of their behavior, but it was not disrupting others’ learning, they would continue to teach.

Another person talked about the need to pick battles, because some students had too many negative interactions with teachers. This person felt that staff label some students as “problems,” and that as soon as that child does a small thing off task or against school rules staff addressed it. This participant felt that for students known to cause behavior problems, it would be wiser and more effective not to address every misbehavior issue that comes up.

Some participants had different views about that. One said, “You can’t ignore things by just sweeping it under the rug, you just have to just nip it in the bud right way. And sometimes that takes time.” This person believed that correcting small behaviors is time consuming, but unless staff do, the behaviors will get worse. Another participant said:

I think the biggest thing is...people leave stuff, and they leave stuff and it festers.

Especially something that really did happen and eventually it will erupt. I try not to let it blow up. I try to dig it up, get the roots out from the weeds, and put new seed back in the ground.

***Raising voice/changing tone.*** Eight participants talked about the tone or volume level of their voice when they are with students. However, there was not one viewpoint common to all eight who discussed this. Three participants said that there were times when it was necessary to have a calm, sweet sounding voice with students. One talked about using a soft tone of voice as one way to help deescalate a negative situation.

Two different participants felt there were times when it was necessary to use a strong, firm tone of voice. One described it as using an “authoritative” tone of voice. Another stated that even a stronger or more negative tone might be necessary. This participant said:

Sometimes they just need to know ‘Oh, he’s not the one to mess with.’ ... honestly, a lot of times that we have problems, that’s what stops it. And especially when things are at a high level, I have to match their level. So the interventions, that’s not something that is taught. But sometimes you have to go to their level to stop the behavior.

This participant felt that, despite attending trainings where they learned not to become upset when the students are upset, it was the only thing that was effective in some circumstances. The two people who advocated raising their voice, or using a very firm voice, were individuals

who work directly with students with struggling behaviors. They spend the majority of their workday with students who receive the most discipline referrals, or with students who receive the most support for behavioral or educational issues.

Other participants expressed regret when they had raised their voices at students. One participant learned to go to students and apologize afterwards. Two others talked about raising their voice because of the stress or busyness of the job, but they were always working on not letting themselves act that way.

***Reference to current initiatives.*** Eight out of the 15 participants talked about current school improvement initiatives introduced by the school or the district. A couple people mentioned more than one improvement initiative. Five participants brought up Responsive Classroom. Some were positive about Responsive Classroom, stating that this program taught teachers to model desired behaviors, gave them ways to teach behaviors explicitly, helped build community, and helped raise student voice. As mentioned above, one participant felt that teachers who followed Responsive Classroom principles sometimes gave students too much of any opportunity to express themselves, and this was detrimental to instructional time.

Another recent initiative that multiple people talked about was the work of educational speaker and writer, Sharroky Hollie. Four participants brought up Sharroky Hollie, and one spoke of culturally responsive teaching. Although Hollie spoke to staff about various components of culturally responsive teaching, the concept of “code-switching” was the idea from the Hollie trainings that participants mentioned most often. One participant felt that this does not go far enough, however, and felt that even with the idea of code-switching, there is bias. This participant felt that as the adults and professionals in the building, it is our job to work also to

build a bridge between the school and home culture, not just expect that our students and families change.

Staff talked about two other school improvement initiatives during interviews. One person mentioned NUA and one participant talked about art integration strategies. This person said that art integration strategies were an example of “tools” the school had provided teachers in order to be more effective with instruction and classroom management.

***Individual needs/differentiation.*** Some participants talked about recognizing individual needs of students or differentiating as a behavior management strategy. Four participants said staff should manage students differently based upon their individual needs or personalities. Those who mentioned it brought up this idea more than once throughout the course of the interviews. One participant mentioned it five different times throughout the interview, and two participants mentioned behavior management differentiation four times.

***Bringing focus back to academics and instruction.*** Staff stated that bringing student focus back to academics and instruction was a behavior management strategy. Staff members talked about this in two different ways. Seven participants talked about this in a reactive way. For example, an undesired behavior would happen, and the staff would try to bring student attention back to the academic goal. Three people, however, talked about focusing on academics and instruction in a proactive way. They believed that by providing high quality engaging learning opportunities, students were less likely to break school rules.

***Summary of strategies staff use.*** Participants believed being proactive was an important component of behavior management. Many participants talked about two major ways to be proactive: build relationships and teach behaviors explicitly. Consistency was a major theme, and every participant brought it up as something needed, or that staff need more consistency. Very

few participants talked about current initiatives that district or building staff had undertaken. I will discuss this, as well as other results for strategies staff use, further in Chapter 5.

**Justifications for student behavior.** An overarching theme interwoven throughout the ways staff talked about students, ways staff talk about colleagues and themselves, and strategies staff use, was the justification of student misbehavior. Through the coding and analysis stage, I discovered that every participant made justifications or gave reasons for student misbehavior. They described reasons that they felt it was not within students' abilities to follow school rules and expectations. Nearly every time a participant discussed a negative student behavior, the participant explained or made an excuse for that student's behavior. Only twice in the course of the fifteen interviews did a staff member talk about negative student behaviors without justifying it or giving an explanation or excuse.

Most participants gave justifications for student misbehavior multiple times, and six participants did these five or more times throughout the course of their interviews. Of the participants who had less than five years of experience in the school setting, four gave justifications for student misbehavior five or more times, and two staff with less than five years of experience in education gave two or three justifications. Those two participants did not serve in traditional classroom teacher roles. Of the participants who had been in the school or the district 10 years or longer, the frequencies for justifying student misbehavior varied. One intermediate teacher who had been at this particular school for over twenty years justified student misbehavior five times, whereas a specialist teacher who had been in the district over 20 years justified student behavior just once. There did not seem to be a relationship between length of time in the building or district and frequency of student behavior justifications.

The justifications that participants gave for student misbehavior varied. Most participants described more than one reason that students could not follow school expectations. Nine participants thought students were not able to follow school expectations because of their culture. One person said it was due to race and that teachers were not being culturally responsive enough. Nine also believed a student's home life was a reason they misbehaved. Six participants explained student misbehavior by stating staff were not meeting students' emotional needs.

The majority of reasons given for students not following school expectations were things participants believed teachers should fix. Of the 21 different justifications for student misbehavior, three were student centered, or things that they believed were conditions of the children. The remaining eighteen were things teachers did, did not do, or things with which they could assist students.

### **Conclusion**

I identified three core categories in data analyses of the interview responses. These are, "ways staff talk about students," "ways staff talk about colleagues and themselves," and "strategies staff use." These three categories and their corresponding themes address my central research question. In Chapter 5, I will explain how school personnel perceive and manage student behavior in a highly diverse single urban elementary school with a lower than average rate of student achievement in reading and mathematics. I use the results in Chapter 4, including details about setting, responses to the survey, and my qualitative interviews to form the conclusion about my research question.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Recommendations, and Conclusions

I identified three core categories from the results of the study: (a) ways staff talk about students, (b) ways staff talk about colleagues and themselves, and (c) strategies staff use for behavior management. I also concluded through the responses that staff make many justifications for student misbehavior, and have a tendency not to talk about student consequences.

In this chapter, I will discuss the themes from this mixed-methods study related to the central research question: how do teachers, administrators, and other school personnel perceive and manage student behavior in a highly diverse single urban elementary school with a lower than average rate of student achievement in reading and mathematics? I will then give recommendations, describe limitations of the study, and give suggestions for future research.

### Discussion

#### Ways Staff Talk about Students

During the qualitative interviews, I asked participants questions regarding student behaviors that are the most disruptive, students' home lives, and students' cultures. Participants also talked about their perceptions of student behavior in response to other questions. Their observations and opinions concerning student behaviors, student home lives, and the relationship of culture and behavior management may give some insight into adult actions. Also noteworthy was the lack of discussion of another student characteristic—race.

**Behaviors of students causing the biggest concerns.** Staff believe instructional time is lost to student misbehaviors. Both interview participants and survey respondents indicated that talking out of turn was the most frequent student behavior problem, and the behavior that caused the most loss of time for instruction. Interview participants and survey respondents reported that inattention/off-task behavior/non-compliance was also a major problem at this school. Interview

participants were particularly concerned when one or more students frequently disrupted the learning opportunities of classmates. These findings were similar to what Ward (2009) found in a study of elementary school students and teachers. Teachers in Ward's study found it particularly difficult to manage students who disrupted the learning of other students, which would include talking out of turn. Ward also reported that teachers in her study were most concerned about students whom staff considered chronic offenders and for whom behavior management techniques were not effective.

**Emotional and psychological needs of students.** When staff at the school spoke about children, they often brought up the emotional needs that the students have, as they relate to following school rules and expectations. Every participant--except for one specialist teacher--brought up emotional needs of students. Staff stated that students might not follow school behavior expectations if adults in the building do not meet or address their emotional needs. They were very concerned with the emotions of students, and they looked for ways to address students' emotional and psychological needs. They reported addressing emotional needs by teaching empathy, and acknowledging and planning for student anger. Often when participants talked about students struggling with their behavior, they reported one of their first steps was to calm students or help students work through emotions.

In a report for Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning (CASEL), researchers reported that social and emotional needs of students are of great concern to public school teachers in the United States (Bridgeland, Bruce, & Hariharan, 2013). The researchers surveyed a representative sample of pre-kindergarten through 12<sup>th</sup> grade teachers. They found that not only are the social and emotional needs of students important to teachers, but that teachers found these to be teachable skills in the school setting. In their study, 95 % believed that



social and emotional skills are teachable, and 97 % believed teaching these will benefit all students, regardless of backgrounds (Bridgeland et al., 2013).

While many participants at my site believed they should be concerned about students' social and emotional skills, some participants felt that too much attention was devoted to this. They felt that this happened at the expense of learning. When adults in the building are attending to student emotional needs, they also should be thinking about the educational goals at that time. Some may say that students cannot achieve educational goals, if one does not have other needs met first, but adults can take care of emotional needs in a way that does not supersede or ignore the educational goals and standards that the student needs to learn.

One participant suggested a few strategies to help students get what they needed in terms of emotional support without taking any learning time. One suggestion was to have a class chart with facial emotions, and students could indicate on the chart where they were for the day or part of the day. Another suggestion was to use before school time, recess time, or other breaks to address emotional needs. The fear common among these participants is that by addressing emotional needs all the time, there would be less focus on academics.

**Students and home life.** Participants had several different ways they talked about students' home life. One theme that multiple people brought up was that staff need to counteract negative things learned at home. A second major theme was that home life may be a factor in student behavior in school, but it is not the only factor. Some participants blamed parents, while no participants praised parents.

Question seven in my interview guide was specifically about the effect that parents and guardians have on student behavior in school. Twelve of the interview participants spoke about the negative effects parents and home lives have over students. Four spoke of both negative and

positive affects the students at this school have from their parents and home life, and only one spoke about parents and home life in a completely positive way. These findings were similar to what Kulinna (2008) found in a study of 199 kindergarten through 12 grade physical education teachers. These teachers rated the students' homes as the biggest cause of moderate or severe behaviors.

It is noteworthy that the majority of participants, without prompting by me, began talking about the negative effects of students' families and home. Would this be the case at other schools, particularly schools that are not high-poverty? Why do they view parents/guardians/home life as mostly negative? What have students said to them, or what have they witnessed that leads them to have this opinion? It is possible that students' home lives are not as negative an influence as these participants thought. If that is the case, more communication and listening on the part of the staff members might be helpful in order to bridge that potential bias.

Do staff unintentionally create a self-fulfilled prophecy regarding student behavior? Do some believe that because many students come from disadvantaged backgrounds, that they are going to struggle more with behavior and academics, and thus the staff does not expect as much from them? Do some people believe that some kids are not going to do as well because their home lives are difficult, and then expect negative behaviors, rather than correct them and work with students to improve them?

**Race and culture.** School employees and policy makers in this state and across the country have been concerned for many years about closing the achievement gap between White students and students considered racial minorities (Center on Education Policy, 2010).

Researchers who studied standardized test data and student demographics found that for students

in high-poverty schools in this state, race was the biggest determinant for achievement level, over other factors. There was a large gap between the achievement levels of White and Black students, and researchers concluded this was mostly due to racial discriminations or different treatment of students because of race (Myers, Kim & Mandala, 2004).

The student population at the site of my research for 2014-2015 was 43% African-American, 30% Latino, 15% Asian-American, 11% White, and 1% American Indian (MDE, 2014). This school, with the majority of the student body as non-White, had standardized test scores lower than the state average (MDE, 2014). A participant brought up that this school also has a large discrepancy between frequencies of office referrals given to African-American students, compared to White students.

Within the context of a national achievement gap problem, a pronounced achievement gap issue in this state and the racial discrepancies at this school, it is surprising that two-thirds of interview participants never mentioned race. In response to a question about culture, four people talked about race. One of those four brought up race in order to say that they did not believe it was a factor. The only person to mention race outside of the question of culture was an African-American staff member who had been at the school for less than five years. This person's previous work was outside the area of education.

I had hypothesized that race would come up in interviews, because race and the achievement gap is a prevalent educational topic, and race had been the topic of professional development over the last few years at both the district level and at this school site. Staff at this school had a number of trainings about race and cultural competence. Race and speaking openly and honestly about race was a topic of multiple staff meetings.

Participants' lack of mention of race could be partly because I did not ask a question directly about race. The teachers at our school are predominantly White, and my participants were a representative sample, in that a majority is White. Perhaps, despite participating in meetings and trainings about the need to speak openly about race, staff still felt uncomfortable talking about this topic. Some might not have discussed race because as a White person it is not in the forefront of their thinking. It is also possible that when they talked about culture, they meant race, and they were more comfortable talking about culture and felt that would be a more acceptable way to discuss the topic.

One interview question addressed the relationship between culture and student behavior. While many participants believed that culture is a factor in student behavior, there was not a consensus as to what culture meant. Some referred to country of origin, some talked about race, and some talked about the values present in the students' homes.

### **Ways Staff Talk about Colleagues and Themselves**

During the qualitative interviews, two topics I brought up were perceptions of colleagues and analysis of one's own behavior management practices.

**Perceptions of colleagues.** I asked several questions related to perceptions of colleagues. These included, "Do you think teachers spend too much time dealing with behavior Explain"; "What effect does a teacher's personality have on classroom management"; "How often do you think teacher ineffectiveness at classroom management causes student misbehavior."

"Perceptions of colleagues" is an area of very limited research in the field of education. I searched using the ERIC database for scholarly peer-reviewed journals on this topic and there was not relevant research from the United States within the last 30 years. What I found in my research was that participants were more likely to criticize their colleagues than say positive

things about them. Nearly every participant said something negative about colleagues at some point during their interviews.

Participants criticized their colleagues by saying they were too strict or too permissive, not using best practice in behavior management and instruction, not meeting the needs of students emotionally or culturally, and not consistent with their actions or with the actions of other adults in the building. Two participants spoke in some detail about their perceived problem with teachers in the building being too permissive. One participant believed some colleagues have a “missionary syndrome.” Another person felt the permissive tendencies of some staff members do not prepare children for the realities of the real world, such as dealing with people in authority such as police officers.

Participants for the most part did not name specific individuals when they criticized colleagues’ behavior management skills. I was able to recognize a couple of the individuals they were talking about from the descriptions they gave and my knowledge of the staff, but many I were not able to identify or I was not sure whom they spoke of. The only person who did name an individual when speaking about them in a critical way also explained that this individual was new to teaching and one might expect not all of the teacher competencies such as behavior management and instruction would be there yet. This reluctance to say anything bad about colleagues was common to many participants. Staff believed their colleagues could manage student behaviors more effectively, yet they gave justifications or excuses for their colleagues when they pointed this out.

While not everyone criticized colleagues directly, every participant did so at least indirectly, because every person said consistency was an area of improvement for this school. Participants said that “consistency” was a problem, but many did not give further details. By not

stating precisely what the problem is though, and just referring to it as a general issue with “consistency,” one does not learn the exact circumstances that cause conflict.

Some participants spoke about colleagues in ways that were more positive. A few showed empathy for the difficult roles some of their colleagues have. About half of the participants said something positive about colleagues and behavior management. Some comments were general, and directed at the majority of staff. A couple people named specific people that they thought were doing positive or effective things.

Participants were respectful to colleagues in their interviews with me. Any negative things about colleagues were mostly non-judgmental, or they did not name the individual. Despite this perceived politeness, participants still had strong feelings and opinions about their colleagues’ behavior management. They did not always go into specificity as to the true nature of what they were saying. Some participants seemed to be frustrated with colleagues’ choices and actions regarding behavior management. Yet, there was a hesitation to speak openly about this.

Participants did not agree on the nature of colleagues’ behavior management mistakes. Some participants believed others were too strict or authoritarian, while others said that some colleagues were too permissive or loose with rules. This may be because of a lack of empathy or not trying to understand colleagues’ points of view. This could also be because I did not ask directly about this in the interviews, or it may be because the nature of the job is fast-paced and does not allow for empathetic reflection. What I found from the interviews, however, was that staff each had certain student behaviors with which they were stricter and certain behaviors with which they were more flexible.

**Perceptions of oneself.** During the interviews, I also asked staff to reflect and analyze their own behavior management practices. When I asked questions about time spent on behavior,

teacher personality, and teacher ineffectiveness, some participants talked about themselves. I also asked the following questions regarding their own perceptions and behavior management: “Is there ever a disconnect between your own philosophical belief about classroom management and interventions and what you (are able to) put into practice and why”; “How has your behavior management style changed from when you began working with students to now. (If it has changed at all)”

Participants talked more about other people than they did themselves. About half of the participants were critical or analytical of their own behavior management, and a third talked about behavior management successes they had. When participants criticized their own behavior management, they included a rationalization, an excuse, or explanation of things they were doing to overcome a perceived shortcoming in behavior management practices.

Most participants felt a disconnect or noticed a difference between the way they wished to manage student behavior, and the way they did manage student behavior. One participant who did not feel this way believed not managing behavior the way one would like, or not being able to do so, would make education jobs very difficult. Perhaps staff feel stress or internal conflict because they have not or unable to align their philosophical beliefs about student behavior management with their practice.

Educational researchers have written much on teachers and the value of reflection. A search of the ERIC database for the keywords “education,” “teachers,” and “reflection” brought back over 7,000 peer-reviewed materials. However, a search on ERIC using the keywords “behavior management,” “teachers,” and “reflection” resulted in 40 peer-reviewed materials, which suggests that this is an underrepresented area in the field of educational research.

Dray and Wisneski (2011) recommend a process of purposeful reflection on student behavior management so that those working in education can identify any biases or pre-conceived opinions they may have about students or their behaviors. Regan (2009), in an article about teaching students identified as EBD, stressed the importance of reflection.

At the time of interviews, staff at this site had nearly completed their first year as a Q Comp district, and the first year under the state's new law for teacher evaluations. Part of the Q Comp process involves peer coaching, and one of the four major areas on which licensed staff receive coaching is on classroom environment (MDE, 2016). Classroom environment includes behavior management practices. It is possible that after more than a year of peer coaching, staff will be more comfortable with additional reflection, and that more staff will reflect more upon their behavior management practices.

While discussing one's own behavior management practices, it appeared to be natural for participants to talk mostly about negative things. Is it a part of Midwestern culture not to talk about what we do well? Both participants who mentioned multiple successes in behavior management were not from this region originally. Is it a part of school culture not to talk about successes, particularly in the area of behavior management? Do staff not feel they are doing an effective job with behavior management, thus they had a lack of positive things to mention? I cannot determine from the research if the lack of positive discussion regarding behavior management was due to cultural values of the region, cultural values of the school, lack of confidence, or some other factor.

**Staff are ultimately responsible for student behavior.** A common theme among participants was that staff hold the ultimate responsibility for student behavior at school. Participants talked about factors that may influence student behavior, such as culture, home life,



emotions, or psychological issues, but they believed that they had the ability to improve student behavior. This is consistent with Thompson's (2010) findings, in that teachers in this study believed home or culture to be a factor in student behavior, but teachers can also have a strong influence. Ward (2009) also found that teacher actions are a very important aspect of student behavior.

The beliefs of the participants in my study are consistent with Hamre and Pianta's (2005) findings from a study of 910 first grade students. They identified students at risk of failure in school, and studied their experiences after first grade in a classroom with either high or low levels of instructional and emotional support. The students who had high levels of instructional and emotional support, despite having the same risk factors for failure in school, had more positive interactions with teachers. Hamre and Pianta believe this suggests that teachers have a strong ability to affect the behavior of at-risk students (Hamre & Pianta, 2005). These findings are particularly relevant to my study, which focused on behavior of elementary students deemed at high risk of school problems.

When participants in my study spoke about colleagues and themselves, they described things they could do better to improve student behavior, or things that they felt people needed to improve upon to help students. They did not place blame on students for misbehavior. All participants framed it as what the adult in the situation could have done better.

One example of the way participants believed they were responsible, and that they did not place blame on students, was how they discussed students taking advantage of teacher inattention or mistakes. Participants cautioned that students might take advantage of mistakes adults may make. Students may choose not to follow school rules because other kids are also not following rules, because they are (a) with a staff member who is not as skilled in behavior

management, (b) with a teacher who is not prepared and there is too much downtime in the classroom, or (c) they may recognize and manipulate the personalities of teachers.

These responses served almost as a warning that adults in the building should be fully aware and observant of what students are doing, and adults should not allow situations in which students could make the wrong choices. These participants were perhaps hinting that one cannot trust a group of children completely, and the adults working with them should situate the environment for student success. The larger implication behind this is that adults working with children have the capacity to stop most negative behaviors. Although participants started talking about this as something students do, the message behind what they were saying was that staff members could be managing behavior better.

**Summary of perceptions of colleagues and oneself.** While participants did not always approve of everything colleagues did regarding behavior management, and they found ways that they, themselves could improve, they did express the idea that the staff in the building have the ultimate ability to affect change in student behavior management. They truly believed that they and their colleagues can, and are responsible for, making a difference in students' behaviors.

### **Strategies Staff Use**

Adults in this building, according to the interviews, believe that they are responsible for student behavior. Although they may say that culture or home life could be factors, they do believe they are able to make improvements in student behavior or if students are misbehaving, it is the result of what they or another teacher is doing. They believe that if they alter their behavior management strategies, students will follow rules and expectations better.

While examining behavior management, staff identified various strategies they used. Many of the participants discussed the same strategies. These included: proactive steps including

building relationship and teaching behaviors explicitly, recognizing individual needs/differentiation, consistency, use of current initiatives, positive interventions and positivity, picking battles, raising voice/changing tone, and bringing focus back to academics and instruction. Participants were also concerned that they did not have effective solutions for managing the most challenging behaviors that frequently disrupt class.

**Proactive steps.** According to Maag (2004), preventative or proactive behavior management techniques are the most effective. Two-thirds of participants in my study felt it was important to be proactive with students, yet there was not one definition of proactive. Participants talked about proactive as the following things: having a well-organized classroom, pre-teaching expectations, teaching expectations explicitly, and building relationships. According to Gettinger (1988), being proactive in the classroom setting involves three components: (a) planning ahead to avoid problems; (b) managing the instructional and behavioral components of the classroom as one thing, and not separating them into different areas; (c) dealing with processes of the entire class, not just an individual student (Gettinger, 1988).

Lewis and Sugai (1999) defined proactive management as preventative. Steps would include teaching school expectations, providing opportunity to practice, and developing strategies before problem behaviors increase. In a more recent mixed methods study of third through sixth grade teachers, Gilpatrick found that there is a need for more proactive behavior management plans to address noncompliant students (Gilpatrick, 2010).

Some evidence demonstrates that proactive management is particularly beneficial to students considered at-risk, as many are at this school. Cartledge, Singh, and Gibson (2008) wrote that students from culturally or linguistically diverse backgrounds are most likely to

struggle with behaviors and are sometime inappropriately in restrictive special education settings. They believed that with early intervention and a proactive approach to behavior management, these students would have opportunities to adapt to the classroom environment and school personnel would not place them in special education settings at such highly disproportionate rates (Cartledge et al., 2008). Kupper (1999) also found in a research review of behavior management programs that chronic misbehaving students needed a proactive approach.

Given that this elementary school has a high percentage of students considered at-risk and needing intervention, the attention to proactive actions is necessary. Staff at this school have discovered, as is consistent with the literature mentioned above, that proactive behavior management actions are greatly beneficial to at-risk students.

***Building relationships.*** Participants talked about building relationships with students as a proactive step, as well as discussing other benefits of building relationships. Every participant said that building relationships with students was a crucial component of behavior management. Their feelings on this are consistent with researchers who have also found strong connections between relationship building and effective behavior management (Hamre & Pianta, 2001; Patrick, Ryan & Kaplan, 2007; Pianta & Steinberg, 1992; Portilla, Ballard, Adler, Boyce, & Obradovic, 2014).

In this study, there was not consensus about what building a relationship means, and it seemed to mean different things to different participants. Beaty-O’Ferrall, Green, and Hanna (2010) had suggestions for building relationships, and cautioned against some methods for building relationships, like gentle interventions, finding time for bonding, avoiding punishments, and finding activities that give success to all students. They believed these potentially relationship-building steps might result in continued behavior management problems. Some

participants in my study were also concerned with colleagues taking some of these actions, and thus being too soft in behavior management in order to try to build relationships. Beaty-O’Ferrall et al. advocated, instead, for building empathy so that students feel listened to. They believed educators should respect students’ undesired behaviors and recognize that they could modify them to desirable traits. They also felt educators should not let their ego or feelings be a part of behavior management, and that they should make successful intercultural connections (Beaty-O’Ferrall et al., 2010).

While participants felt that adult-student relationships were critical, as the researcher, I question the potential negative effect of focusing primarily on relationships. Is the focus on building relationships making it so students will only behave for adults with whom they have a positive relationship? Are staff inadvertently teaching students that they only need to follow directions from the adults they like? Where does this leave substitute teachers, or people who work with students infrequently and do not have the opportunity to build strong relationships?

***Explicitly teaching expectations.*** Explicitly teaching expectations is another proactive strategy. Every participant except one talked about the need to explicitly teach expectations, yet there was some evidence that interview participants do not believe their colleagues are all doing this. Explicitly teaching expectations and modeling are major components of the Responsive Classroom methods (Responsive Classroom, n.d.). It is also noteworthy that participants hardly mentioned Responsive Classroom, despite the trainings that the district sponsored.

***Individual Needs/Differentiation.*** Several participants talked about the individual needs of students in terms of behavior management, or differentiation in the way they deal with student behaviors. Some students might react better to firm directions, whereas other students respond better when a teacher is friendlier or has a lighter tone with them. A specific consequence might

be appropriate for one student in one circumstance, but may not be appropriate for another student in a similar situation. While researchers find differentiation effective for teaching and instruction (Beecher & Sweeny, 2008; Birnie, 2015; Tomlinson, 2000), its effectiveness for behavior management in United States schools is an area that is not as researched. Fulk and Smith (1995), in their study of elementary school students' perceptions, found that students are opposed to teacher adaptations in behavior management plans for students who have problems with following school expectations or rules. It is possible that students perceiving teachers as being "unfair" creates a negative feeling in the classroom. According to Fulk and Smith (1995), the desire of some staff to differentiate, and give individuals what they think they need, may build discontent and damage relationships with students who would otherwise be content and have positive relationships with staff.

**Consistency.** Every participant brought up consistency as an important factor in behavior management or as something that students and staff need more at the school. Participants described two different types of consistency—consistency among other adults and consistency within oneself. Every person talked about consistency among staff members, and some participants also talked about the need to be consistent with one's own behaviors and actions with students. The fact that every participant brought up consistency hearkens back to the main idea of this research topic—that perceptions of behavior can be subjective. People recognize that there are many different ways people are doing things, which is a problem. Researchers (Freiberg, 1983; Maag, 2004; MacSuga-Gage, Simonsen, & Briere, 2012; Marzano, 2007) have also found consistency to be a key component to effective behavior management. While educational researchers have pointed to the importance of consistency, some participants talked about their behavior management choices that demonstrate using their own discretion.

***Picking battles.*** One way that staff chose to use their own discretion was by “picking battles” and not necessarily addressing every school expectation that students did not follow. The idea behind this strategy is that by not addressing misbehaviors directly each time, the students breaking the rule might disrupt instructional time less frequently. Another reason for choosing this approach is that staff believe the student may choose to stop on their own if their action does not receive attention, or they have decided they no longer want to continue for some other reason.

An educator may find it common sense to “pick battles,” as there are multiple goals and multiple students’ needs to meet at any one moment in a typical classroom. The element that is subjective, however, is which student behaviors are worthy of addressing or not addressing? It is possible that by “picking battles,” adults in the building are adding to the sense of inconsistency. One teacher may be comfortable allowing some students to talk while instruction is happening, whereas another staff person in the building would not allow that. By occasionally letting some misbehaviors slide, such as talking when an adult is addressing the room, it makes it more difficult for those who do not allow that behavior to enforce this. In the situation of students talking while a teacher is talking, it can become a part of the school culture that it is acceptable to talk when a teacher is trying to teach.

Another situation in which “picking battles” arises can be hallway behavior. Participants spoke about loud behavior in the hallway. One participant stated that they did not understand why some staff did not take the time to stop students from talking and making noises in the hallway. It could be that those teachers with loud lines of students are picking their battles, and decided that quieting the students would make them late for wherever they are trying to go, or that students are already overwhelmed with corrections from the teacher that day. However, by

allowing a class to walk loudly in the hallway, other classrooms witness that not everyone in the building enforces a quiet hallway.

Ratcliff et al. (2011) described characteristics of teachers categorized as “needs improvement” and “strong.” “Needs improvement” teachers were more likely to retreat or give up on expectations, among other traits (Ratcliff et al., 2011). It is possible that some staff at this school have given up on some student behavior expectations.

***Raising voice/changing tone.*** Several participants brought up using the tone of their voice as a behavior management technique. Some felt it was necessary at times to raise their voice, and others stressed that there are times when a calm voice is the best choice. Others described times that they had used an angry tone of voice with students, and it had not been effective.

This type of discrepancy can cause friction between staff members. Some feel that raising their voice is necessary, whereas others find it a mistake or feel the need to apologize. One unknown aspect is how staff feel about colleagues who raise their voice at students. It is possible they are judging their peers for doing this or not doing this.

Participants had explanations why they might pick their battles with students, or change the tone of their voice. They described these things as situational, and actions they took when they felt it was the best decision to do so. These choices, however, might be further contributing to the lack of consistency that participants described.

**Use of current initiatives.** During the time of the study, staff received training and were encouraged by administration to use strategies from several school improvement initiatives. These included art integration strategies, Responsive Classroom, and culturally responsive teaching including NUA. Aside from one component of culturally responsive teaching--code-



switching—participants hardly mentioned these initiatives. This is surprising, given the number of years the district and school has supported most of these programs, and the number of staff who received training on them.

One of the major goals of art integration at this school was to increase student engagement and decrease student misbehaviors. Why more staff members did not talk about arts integration is noteworthy. All staff, except for EAs and custodians, received trainings throughout the year on arts integration strategies as a part of our regular schoolwide professional development. Teachers had opportunities to attend additional trainings on weekends. Some teachers went to Washington D.C. and were a part of a national training in this area. One of the people interviewed attended that training in D.C, yet that person did not mention arts integration in the interview at all.

One hypothesis for this is that the school had yet to have a final production to highlight the arts. Shortly after the interviews, the elementary school students performed *Annie Jr.* A local cable news report featured the benefits student received by participating in the musical. Administration, staff, and Turnaround Arts staff talked at school about the positive effect the musical had on students. If I had conducted interviews after the musical performance, more people might have mentioned arts integration.

However, the musical was not the only large event that the school had around the arts that year. In the fall, *Good Morning America* came to the school, along with actors from the studio remake of the movie *Annie*. *Good Morning America* featured this school and this event, which kicked off the arts integration initiative. Local television stations also aired the story. Later in the year, actor Doc Shaw visited the school and worked with students. Perhaps the majority of the staff did not yet see the connection between these celebrity visitors and school improvement

initiatives. It is unknown at this point if arts integration had a marginal impact or if it was just at the beginning stages of implementation and would later result in a bigger impact.

**Positive interventions and positivity.** Another current initiative staff use in this school and school district is SWPBIS. Two thirds of participants talked about SWPBIS and their use of this method. Those who talked about SWPBIS mostly discussed the token rewards, such as Bear Tickets or coins.

Only one person spoke about Tier 1, 2, 3 interventions, and this person regularly dealt with those structures in their job role. There was a lack of mention of use of specific Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions. Participants' understanding and practices of SWPBIS do not seem to allow for a plan of what to do when students habitually do not follow rules. What are staff to do when they have built relationships, used Tier 1 interventions such as Bear Tickets and coins, and negative behaviors persist?

Participants discussed their use of SWPBIS, but it was not clear if the participants believe strongly in its effectiveness. Two of the biggest behavioral concerns survey respondents had for students were talking out of turn and off-task behavior/non-compliance. Survey respondents reported that they give out Bear Tickets most often for students demonstrating respect and achievement. Bear Tickets for these two reasons should address talking out of turn and off-task/non-compliance, yet it seems like they truly do not. Survey respondents also stated that they give out Bear Tickets for the most part to reward students who are doing the right thing. Less than half the survey respondents, however, believed that positive reinforcement helps students who are struggling, or it is not their primary reason for using positive reinforcements. SWPBIS is supposed to have benefits for all students, but this school is not always using it this way, and according to participants in my study, staff do not all believe it does help all students.

Either reason—because they do not believe it helps or because they just want to reward students doing the right thing—does not effectively address the behavior management concerns. If many staff do not believe positive reinforcements help students who are struggling, there would seem to be little reason for even doing them, as the students who make the right choices would make the right choices regardless of positive reinforcements.

If staff believe the strength of positive reinforcements is to give them to students making the right choices, then they are no longer incentives, but a way to discipline or remove a positive reward from students not making the right behavior choices. Thus, they are no longer reinforcing a positive behavior if the intent is to punish or deny a fun activity or desired item to some students. As educational consultant Rubin (2012) wrote, there is a concern that positive incentives are not always positive, and can instead be coercive and a method of exerting power. Kohn (1998) believed they have the potential to punish, because if some students receive a reward, it is likely that one or more students may not. Some students may consider the fear of not getting an award a punishment (Kohn, 1998).

Ratcliff et al. (2011) found that “strong” teachers used positive reinforcement and rewards more often than teachers considered by their administrators as “needs improvement.” “Needs improvement” teachers were more likely to use coercion, punishment, and to retreat or give up on expectations (Ratcliff et al., 2011).

**One or a few students negatively affecting the education of their class.** There may be one or more students in a classroom who demonstrate many negative behaviors, or who act out in severe ways. This can negatively affect the entire class. Over half of the participants mentioned that a single child, or a couple children’s behaviors, might be detrimental to all of the other students’ learning. They described this happening because severe behaviors take away

from class time, or a student acting out may make the negative behaviors appear normal or acceptable to children who would otherwise not engage in them. This belief appears to be a major issue at this particular school. This was a topic brought up by eight participants without any prompting and in response to different interview questions. Those who brought it up were particularly concerned about it. One participant said that it was a problem that they noticed, but that it also appeared to be a large issue in this school based upon conversations this participant had had with other staff members.

Participants in my study had suggestions to help solve this problem. Some participants suggested they would like more help from administration. There is some indication from researchers, however, that educators can do more in individual classrooms. Gage and McDaniel (2012) recommend collecting and analyzing data on students who are a particular cause for concern. They recommended a systemized approach to databased decision making in the classroom for student behaviors. The first step is to clearly define the problem and establish what success would look like in this setting. Next, one should make a plan and decide how one will collect and analyze the data. The third step is to collect the data. Finally, one should analyze the data and make changes in instruction based up on the data (Gage & McDaniel, 2012).

Scott, Hirn, and Alter (2014) also studied this issue, and believed classroom changes could help. They analyzed 1,197 observations of teacher and student behavior in the elementary and middle school settings. All schools served populations with greater than 50% eligible for free and reduced lunch. Each observation consisted of an observer and one student. They randomly selected students, but included a mix of genders and ethnicities that approximated the school population. They found that teachers were only engaging students in teaching activities for 59% of an instructional period. They found that teaching—whether it was direct instruction,

supervised group work, or some other form—was associated with lower levels of behavior disruptions. Thus, higher rates of teaching and student engagement during instructional time would reduce severely disruptive behaviors (Scott et al., 2014).

Scott et al. (2014) believe that for students who exhibit negative or distracting behaviors to improve their school behavior, they need to spend more time engaged in instruction. They state that the way to do this is by students experiencing success with instruction. Thus, teachers should plan their lessons in a way that allows all students—particularly those who struggle with behavior management—to succeed.

Participants described some specific ways to solve the problem of one or more students negatively affecting their classmate's learning. One participant in my study said that there should be a place for students to go who habitually disrupt the classroom environment. Kauffman , Bantz, and McCullough (2002) studied twelve fifth and sixth-grade students who had been in a self-contained classroom for two years. Staff chose students to be a part of this class because they had emotional and behavioral disorders. Special education staff and educational assistants taught these twelve students in a self-contained classroom, and the perception from their teachers as well as other staff in the building was that students were more successful in their own classroom because the environment and instruction fit their needs. General education teachers believed this setting allowed the students to have their specific emotional and behavioral needs met, students were able to achieve more, and the students did not negatively affect the learning of other classmates (Kauffman et al., 2002). This method could be highly controversial, with the current established practice in public schools to provide equal classroom settings for all students. The equity of a separate classroom is controversial, particularly if students receive special

education services, as it may not meet the federal requirement of Least Restrictive Environment (LRE). LRE means:

to the maximum extent appropriate, children with disabilities, including children in public or private institutions or other care facilities, are educated with children who are not disabled, and special classes, separate schooling, or other removal of children with disabilities from the regular educational environment occurs only when the nature or severity of the disability of a child is such that education in regular classes with the use of supplementary aids and services cannot be achieved satisfactorily (United States Department of Education, 2016).

Thus, if educators wished to provide a separate educational space for students with emotional or behavioral disorders, educators would need to show that the student had disabilities that required a separate setting and interventions in the regular education classroom and aids were ineffective.

Some in the field of education question how much the schools can do to change the behavior of the most challenging students. One participant paraphrased a colleague stating that we would not be able to fix everything, but as the adults in these students' school lives, we could be a "soft place to land" amidst their troubles. Another participant said that most school interventions do not go far enough to help students, because they do not address the root of the problem: students come from disadvantaged homes and face multiple challenges there.

Some researchers believe students experiencing the most traumatic of home life experiences may not ever improve in terms of behavior. Shaw, Gilliom, Ingoldsby, and Nagin (2003) studied 284 low-income boys age two to eight who had severe behavior problems. They analyzed behavior tendencies of the boys, socio-economic family settings, and relationships with

parents. They concluded that even early intervention with children exhibiting strong behavior problems might be inadequate because it does not address the challenges that these children face living in poverty. These challenges included low parental education and job acquirement, low social support and fewer resources for childcare, poor housing, unsafe neighborhoods, schools with high rates of peer misbehavior, and frequent transitions by parents. These researchers felt that most successful interventions needed to address the parents' abilities to provide safe and loving environments for the children (Shaw et al., 2003).

This school in my study did do some things to help families. Most significantly, a full time psychologist worked with students during the school day. There were some barriers to getting all students needing this type of support the service, namely that it was difficult at times to get parents to complete the necessary paperwork and that the psychologist did not have time to see all the students who were identified as potentially benefiting from the help. However, this service existed for many students, was available at convenient times for students, and the school helped students qualify for the services.

**Bringing focus back to academics and instruction.** A few staff at the school discussed bringing a focus back to strong academics and quality instruction. Participants talked about this in two different ways. Some said that when there was an undesired behavior, they tried to draw the attention back to the academic task students should be doing. A couple staff members also talked about using quality, engaging lessons as a proactive way to stop undesirable behaviors from starting.

It is noteworthy that only three people talked about this as a strategy they use. I did not ask an interview question that directly addressed quality instruction, and more participants may use or may consider quality instruction a way to address misbehavior. However, as quality

instructional strategies and effective classroom management are linked, it is surprising that more participants did not talk about this (Maag, 2004; Marzano, 2007).

Maag (2004) wrote that one cause of student misbehavior is the lack of time spent by students responding to academic questions and engaged in academic discussion. He wrote that students are less likely to disrupt others when they are engaging in quality academic instruction. Haydon, Borders, Embury, and Clarke (2009) also wrote about this. According to Haydon et al. (2009), one way to provide effective instruction and thus diminish behavior problems was to increase the students' opportunities to engage in discussions. They recommended four strategies to do this. The first was choral responding, in which the whole class gives a quick response to questions posed by the teacher at a fast pace. The second was response cards, in which the teacher uses individual white boards or other materials for students to write their own answer to questions posed to the group. The third was errorless learning, in which the teacher scaffolds concepts for students by first embedding the answer in the question, then gradually provides less and less support until students are able to answer the concept with no prompting. The fourth was wait time, in which the teacher pauses three to five seconds before taking student responses to a question (Haydon et al, 2009).

It is important for teachers and staff working in a school to recognize that the curriculum and instructional techniques are an antecedent or cause of student behavior, whether that behavior is positive or negative (Maag, 2004). Quality instruction that engages students and provides students many opportunities for interaction with the material will reduce behavior problems. One participant said that they did not feel adults in the building were doing enough to make students want to stay in the classroom. This person believed that if students were more excited and engaged in the academic material, they would not misbehave because they would not



want to miss opportunities. Although many difficult student behavior issues contain more nuances than this, it is crucial for teachers to recognize that the quality of their instruction is a valuable tool in preventing and managing behaviors in the classroom.

### **Justifications for Student Misbehavior**

During the coding process, I noticed a major theme woven through the ways staff talk about students, colleagues and themselves, or strategies they use. Throughout the interviews, I heard staff give numerous justifications for student misbehavior, or reasons that they believed students were not able to follow behavior expectations. Every participant mentioned at least once a reason that students could not follow rules.

Staff detailed examples of why students were not able to behave. They stated that students were not able to follow expected rules because of various factors outside of the students' control (Table 17). They believed that the ability to follow school expectations is not the job of students, and that teachers only are responsible for whether or not kids follow school rules. There may be factors contributing to children's misbehaviors such as home life or culture, but they believed it is up to the teacher to manage these things.

All the justifications seemed to come from a position of caring. Staff believe in reflecting and looking at ways they can make the situation better, and acted proactively by looking at the reasons for misbehavior. The problem is when it becomes less about finding solutions and more about excusing the behavior without looking for any real change or improvement.

Although every participant gave justifications for student behavior, not all those who I interviewed considered the justifications an excuse for misbehavior. One participant stressed the purpose of school is to learn. This person acknowledged that students might have obstacles to

success, but this participant did not consider them barriers, believing there were ways around them, and in an educational setting, students must get around their obstacles.

Another danger in the use of justifications for student misbehavior is that one may subconsciously or consciously believe students are not capable of any better behavior. In other words, some people may expect that students who are predominantly non-White and living in high poverty will not be able to follow school expectations. Participants spoke about building relationships and caring for the emotional side of students, but there was a lack of mention of other ways students may be successful in school, namely, (a) high quality, rigorous instruction for all students, and (b) clear consequences for not following school expectations. In a review of 21 successful school principals in high poverty, high achieving schools, one leader said that in less successful schools, child psychology has replaced basic skills, and a culture of therapy has replaced a culture of achievement and success (Carter, 2000). Another principal of an academically successful high-poverty school said, “The trouble is...they're always trying to teach these kids in a different way because they're poor. Just teach them! They say they're trying to anticipate their needs, but what they do is determine their failure” (Carter, 2000).

One participant in my study talked about a pervasive problem not just at this site, but also throughout other schools—educators that have a missionary syndrome. Dr. Eric Cooper, president of NUA described it this way:

Too often, low-performing children of color need rigor in school as much or more than the advantaged child. Too often they do not get it. Because of misplaced compassion, or a lack of confidence in the capacity of African-American and Latino students to succeed academically with rigorous and challenging content, their curriculum is ‘thinned,’ and the

pace of instruction slowed. Too often, rigorous expectations are lowered or avoided entirely.” (NUA, 2016)

Educational researchers have expressed concern about White educators in predominantly non-White and high poverty schools who believe their role is to “save” the students (Cipolle, 2006; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Matias & Liou, 2014; Michie, 2007). At the site I studied, the majority of the licensed staff is White, female, and seems to be middle class. This trend is true of the rest of the country (Aritomi, Coopersmith, & Gruber, 2009). There are many White middle class women teaching non-White children, and, like the participants in my study, many are not comfortable or do not want to speak about race (Matias & Lou, 2014; Yoon, 2012; Castagno and Vaught, 2008). According to some, ignoring race can even harm non-White students (Michie, 2007).

Matias and Liou (2014) wrote about their work with White teacher candidates. These prospective teachers were likely not to talk about race or would claim to be colorblind. At the same time, they felt they had a duty to save urban non-White students from their perceived deficits. Although this came from a position of caring, it also could serve to promote the concept of White culture as superior and that non-Whites are in need of “saving” by White individuals. The teacher candidates felt a need to help high-poverty areas due to their lack of resources. Matias and Liou (2014) felt Hollywood romanticized this concept in movies about White teachers turning around non-White classrooms or schools. They did acknowledge that promotion of White supremacy in this way might have been unintentional on the part of these teacher candidates; however, despite the intentions it is still a problem to be addressed (Matias & Liou, 2014).

Michie (2007) interviewed four teachers who were not White, and asked them their advice to White teachers. According to the teachers he interviewed, race does matter. It is also important not to just have good intentions, but to learn about the culture and devise strategies for teachers of students of various races in cooperation with professionals of that same race (Michie, 2007). Teachers he interviewed also spoke about academically challenging the students, and having high standards for them. He said of his own experience with students:

Too often, I had let my students' tough circumstances reduce my expectations, consciously or not, to more "realistic" ones—an all-too common response of well-meaning "progressive" teachers. Of course, being aware of students' outside school challenges is essential. But feeling sorry for them and allowing them to not learn—is something we must actively guard against. Teachers need to do all they can to understand the forces that constrain their students and show compassion for their situations, but at the same time they must arm students with the necessary tools to push against those constraints with all the force they can muster. (Michie, 2007)

The justifications of the participants at the site came from what I perceive as a condition of caring for the students. It is noteworthy, however, that both of the African-American staff members I interviewed spoke about a need for higher standards for students.

## **Recommendations**

### **Colleague Relationships and Personal Reflection**

Staff were more likely to be critical about colleagues than positive. It is my recommendation that staff could benefit from more frequent and more open conversations about behavior management with their colleagues. Participants were quick to label colleagues as too strict or too loose. Interview responses indicate that no one is just a hard-lined disciplinarian, and no one is just too soft and accommodating with children. Adults in the building have different

priorities. When staff do have conversations about behavior management, like what occurred during the interviews I conducted, I learned about specific teachers' priorities, and what the priorities are for their different classroom settings. For example, a gym teacher would have different behavior management goals than a fifth-grade science teacher. Alternatively, a music teacher who does a lot of group, cooperative activity with students is going to make different behavior management choices in order to keep the class engaged than a third-grade teacher who is currently having students do independent seatwork. Maag (2004) recommended the elimination of subjectivity when staff discuss student behaviors. Maag recommended objective observations. It is my recommendation that staff speak specifically about the setting, current goals with students, and student characteristics when they discuss behavior management. By not describing the actual problems or sources of conflict, staff cannot find solutions.

Q Comp provides a structure for staff to reflect upon their instructional and behavior management practices, but Q Comp coaches do only observe licensed staff three times per year. I would recommend staff be encouraged to self-reflect more often, and that self-reflection on behavior management could be a part of any meetings that may be scheduled for behavior management. Another suggestion is that school leaders dedicate staff development or staff meeting time to reflect on behavior management. Teams or partners could talk and brainstorm reasons why student misbehavior is occurring in their classes, and then come up with realistic plans to make it better. Staff could do this in a peer setting, such as a behavior PLC, or they could do this with a coach such as the PBIS coach or a person in a similar role.

Staff did not talk about their own successes often, and they expressed discontent that they did not always manage behavior in ways that reflected their philosophical beliefs. It is my recommendation that staff be encouraged to not only discuss and analyze their behavior

management practices more, but also to discuss and celebrate their strengths and successes in behavior management. Most participants talked about the value of being positive with students. Teachers and other staff should be encouraged to be more positive with themselves and with each other. Criticism seemed to come more naturally, but saying positive things about colleagues and oneself would help people recognize their strengths and continue to build upon them. (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001).

A form of SWPBIS for teachers and other staff may be effective. Instead of staff only getting attention when they do not handle a difficult situation in the desired way, administration or a staff SWPBIS team could recognize staff for work well done. Whether or not a full token economy would be useful is unknown, but it could be worth exploring SWPBIS programs for staff. Q Comp addresses this somewhat, with rewards for meeting teaching standards, but it does not do what SWPBIS does for students, which is provide immediate feedback on positive things they are doing. SWPBIS reinforces the desirable, in hopes that the desirable behaviors will increase.

There could be more immediate recognition of staff for doing best practices in behavior management. It could be as simple as an administrator telling a staff member “I noticed the way you listened carefully when that student was upset. That was very effective.” It could also look like peers telling one another, “I see that you always have such quiet lines in the hallway.” By peers being encouraged to have those interactions, it may also open the door for them to discuss what specifically they are doing to be effective. In the example of quiet hallway lines, staff could discuss what steps the teacher is taking to get quiet lines.

Staff could benefit from more time to reflect on behavior management. Because the reflections they did share in the interviews were mostly negative, they could also benefit from

being encouraged to reflect positively upon the behavior management practices of themselves and others. Additionally, by talking more openly about successes people would learn from one another, and recognize that other staff are not necessarily just “too loose” or “too strict,” but have different priorities. These types of conversations may contribute to a more positive work environment.

### **Strategies in Behavior Management**

Staff identified talking out of turn and non-compliance as two particularly disruptive behaviors. Administrators or designated peers could do short observations to gather more data about these two types of negative behaviors. It would then be possible to look at what strategies staff might need to learn or review. More use of already established SWPBIS Tier 1 interventions, such as Bear Tickets, could potentially help decrease the amount of talking out of turn and non-compliant behaviors. Individual teachers or groups of teachers could conduct their own action research to determine if using Bear Tickets or other Tier 1 interventions are effective strategies for these problems. It is also possible that staff have not tried these interventions for a long enough time period, or they have not found an intervention that works best for students with this problem. According to PBIS World (n.d.), a teacher should try an intervention for at least four weeks and may use more than one intervention at the same time. If there is no positive change after that, Tier 2 interventions may be appropriate (PBIS World, n.d.).

Another area that staff were concerned about was if one or more students have a severely negative impact on the rest of the class. It would be beneficial to find more from adults in the building on this issue, such as why it happens, when, and what they have done in their classrooms to help. If staff are not using Tier 2 and Tier 3 interventions, they could get support in starting these. Additionally, the staff could work together to come up with reasonable solutions

for the whole school. A team, including members of administration, special education, classroom teachers, and specialists could explore options for improvements in this area. As one participant suggested, the goals should be to address the needs of both the students that are causing the problems as well as the other students. Interventions for the family could continue, and perhaps the school could start more partnerships with community-based organizations.

Consistency was a problem mentioned by participants, and more consistency could help improve problems with students blurting, non-compliance, and severe behaviors. First, all staff need to be aware there is an issue with consistency. The students do have a code of conduct, and administration has communicated plans for students who do not follow expectations, yet some staff feel these are optional.

It is my recommendation that there is further study on the reported lack of consistency. This could be an area of discussion for teams of teachers or for whole staff meetings. I noticed that staff members had different priorities when they spoke about students and behavior management. There is a need to sit down and have open conversations about things that are inconsistent in buildings—like raising voice, or hallway behavior. Some staff value order, some valued spontaneity. At this site some viewed the emotional development of students as the first priority, while others said achievement levels in subject areas was most important.

If staff had open conversations about their priorities with students, they might better understand and possibly respect the choices their colleagues make regarding behavior management. Adults could understand better why a colleague chooses to ignore something another colleague would not. This is not to say everyone must do everything the same, as staff have different styles of interactions with students. However, it would be efficacious to be aware of how one's choices with students may clash or complement another staff member's choices.



Through these conversations, staff could also discuss and identify more building wide non-negotiable behavior standards, and thus staff could have better consistency.

Another area school staff could look at is being proactive with students. A further discussion by staff of proactive behavior management steps would be beneficial. Participants are already aware of the importance of being proactive by building relationships and stating rules explicitly, but the staff could use further discussion on other proactive steps. It is my recommendation that at the beginning of the school year, teams or the whole staff have conversations about the proactive steps they all take in their own work with students.

Staff awareness and use of building-wide and district-wide initiatives is another area for improvement. Staff are not all aware of the current initiatives at the school, nor are they all willing or able to implement them with fidelity. All staff, even those who already trained in Responsive Classroom, could benefit from review of Responsive Classroom practices. At staff meetings or at PLCs, staff could volunteer to share examples of lessons they had done that integrate arts or are culturally responsive. Administrators, peer coaches, TOSAs, and team leads could remind staff about the needed work on current initiatives such as Responsive Classroom, arts integration, and culturally responsive teaching.

### **Bias, Justifications, Student Accountability, and High Standards**

Staff have a tendency to shift blame from students to the shoulders of staff. While this is a positive thing in that staff do believe they can be change agents for good in students' lives, this also has negative effects. Staff do not hold students to high enough standards in terms of behavior management because staff believe there are many occasions in which it is not possible for students to follow school rules.

Staff reported their concern about students' emotional and psychological needs. Some students may be experiencing trauma, some may have post-traumatic stress disorder, and some may have diagnosed or undiagnosed psychological conditions that might not allow them to follow school expectations without assistance. Other students may have IEPs or 504 plans that state their need for assistance or accommodations in school expectations. It is first necessary to determine if a student is not able to follow expectations because of one of these reasons. If so, these students need to receive more support from the school, outside services, or both.

If negative behaviors are not due to one of the things I mentioned above, my recommendation is a two-fold strategy to help with this problem. First, staff should examine their perceptions and beliefs about students in poverty and of various races. Then, there should be a change in action or practice.

Staff need to examine their reasons for justifying student misbehavior within the context of critical race theory. What effect do their race and their own implicit or explicit bias have over the way they choose to manage student behavior? Culture and race are potential areas for further study by staff. Despite past efforts to address race, this still appears to be a topic these participants were not comfortable speaking about, or they had reasons for not wanting to mention it. Culture is a term that means many things to the various participants. Perhaps this means that all adults in the building need to become aware of the many different aspects that make up culture, and the many ways culture may manifest in an individual. Staff in the building could continue to understand that culture has many components, so they are sensitive to the many different ways students are different, and aware that there are a multitude of factors that can cause misbehavior or perceived misbehavior.

Participants spoke of parents and home life as a negative factor in students' lives. Staff should look for more ways to engage parents, as more partnership between staff and parents might help the negative perceptions that staff have. Making staff aware, also, of a potential initial reaction to be negative about home life, might also help. If more staff are aware that some react negatively first to students' home life situations, it might make some staff analyze and evaluate their own thoughts and perceptions.

Staff should then look to change their practice with students. They should continue their work in building relationships with students, and taking time to get to know students. According to the results of my interviews and survey, the staff members' preferred behavior management strategies are building relationships and setting clear expectations. Not to discount those two steps, but despite the focus on those two strategies, students demonstrate severe and frequent misbehaviors at this school. Some staff perceived behaviors as the best in the beginning of the school year, just before the *Good Morning America* television crews came. At this time, teachers were more consistent with behavior expectations, and staff expected all students to meet the same high standards. The students were successful at this. It is my recommendation school staff work for this type of consistency and high level of expectations the entire school year.

Staff did not speak often about consequences, and according to the survey, staff rated consequences as the least preferred or effective strategy in maintaining good behavior management in the classroom. Bondy et al. (2007) recommended that consequences were an important part of preparing students for success. Bondy et al. also advised that school staff be "warm demanders," who are compassionate yet firm with expectations. I recommend that staff focus on the concept of "warm demanders," as this would allow staff to use their skills in relationship building and to build upon their need to raise expectations.

While relationships are important, one should be careful that when building relationships one is not choosing interventions that are too soft or not purposeful. They should not sacrifice instructional time, they should not avoid consequences, and they should not let all children win all the time. Instead, staff should build relationships in the school setting through teaching empathy, showing an interest in the whole child, recognizing student strengths, and remaining unemotional as the adults in behavior management procedures. Students should understand that they should give respect and follow school expectations for any adult in the building, regardless of the students' relationship with that adult.

Improving the quality of instruction and raising academic rigor may be another way to improve behavior management (Haydon et al., 2009; Maag, 2004; Marzano, 2007). Leadership should remind staff throughout the year to create and implement high quality lessons. Staff could share ideas at staff meetings and PLCs for engaging, rigorous lessons in which students have shown success. Partnerships with gifted and talented teachers, special education teachers, and other staff may be one way to provide enrichment for students who have mastered grade level materials and rigor for those who have not.

Rather than give justifications or reasons for students who are struggling, staff need to raise their standards and provide support to the students so they can reach high behavior management and academic standards. They should work in conjunction with adults representing the various races and ethnicities in the school to improve learning opportunities for these children. See Figure 1 for a summary of identified behavior management problems and recommendations.

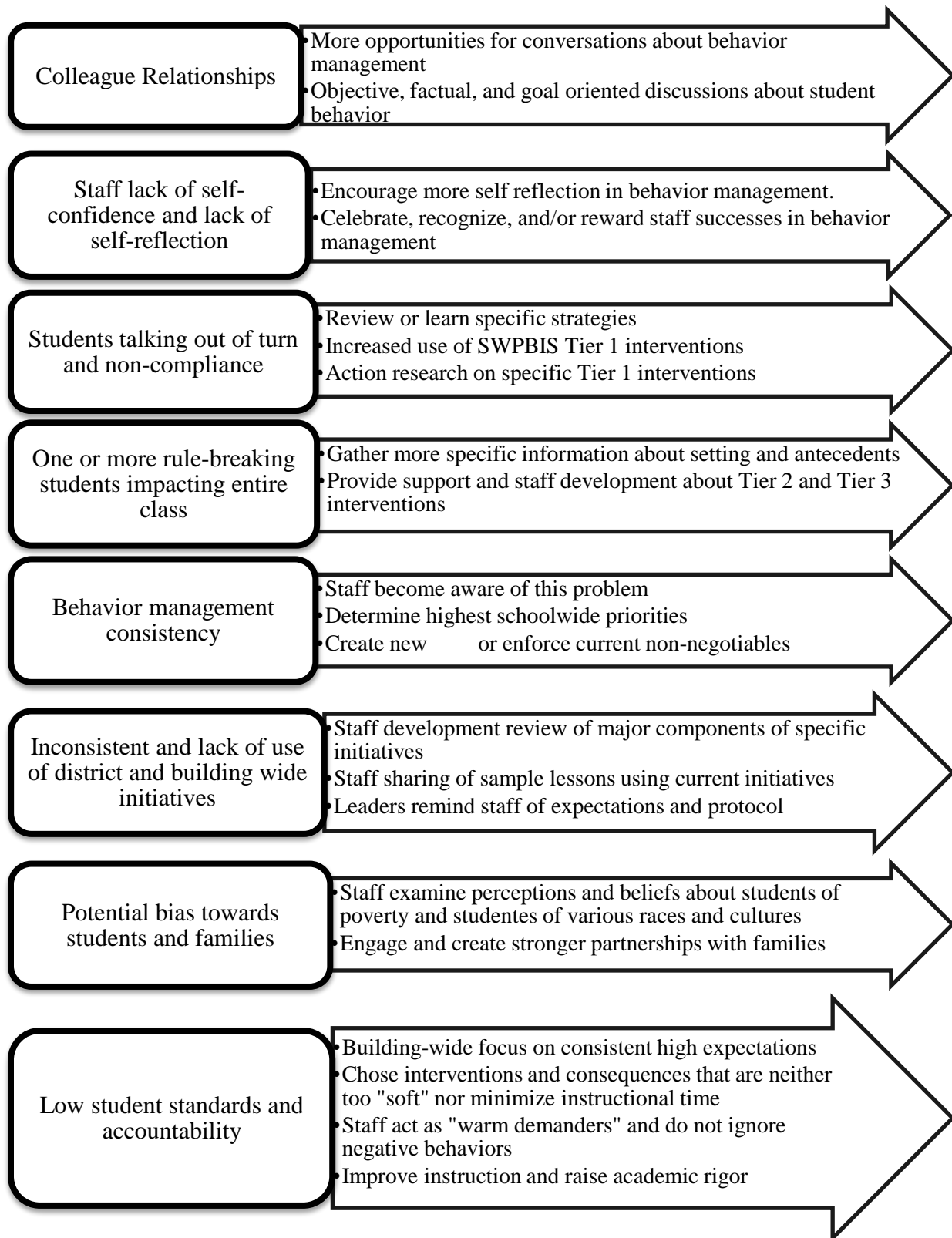


Figure 1: Behavior management problems and recommendations.

### **Limitations**

A potential limitation of this study was the number of survey respondents. Though the results of my survey regarding perceptions of behavior management problems were consistent with other studies on behavior management, I might have learned more about SWPBIS implementation at this school had more staff completed the survey.

There is also the possibility that although I was not in a position of authority over interview participants and they knew I would not identify individuals, some participants gave answers that they felt were socially acceptable. There may have been some subjects on which they did not want to elaborate because of a desire to have non-controversial responses.

Another potential limitation is researcher bias. I have addressed this in several ways. I provide rich data, including in-depth interviews and transcripts of these interviews. I used member-checks or respondent validation with interview participants to confirm themes I discovered (Maxwell, 2013). Once I identified themes from the data, I looked for possible discrepant evidence.

The results from this study may provide recommendations to this school. Schools with similar demographics or using similar reform initiatives may make comparisons, but results may or may not be transferable due to the complexity of school settings and the myriad of factors that affect school change and improvement.

### **Suggestions for Future Research**

I uncovered several areas of further research through this study. A potential area for further research is an investigation of the conditions which adults might ignore student misbehavior, or which specific misbehaviors adults find acceptable to ignore in order to continue

teaching or to meet daily schedules. Another area of study could be perceptions of adults raising one's voice with a student.

Staff members did not speak about current school improvement initiatives. Further study could help to determine what influence those school improvement programs have had at this site. Study on art integration, culturally responsive teaching, Responsive Classroom, and SWPBIS might give more description of implementation and results of these initiatives. Areas for exploration would include staff buy-in, levels of implementation, barriers for implementation, and student behavior and academic data.

Another area for research would be an examination on the effects of using a positive incentive system for staff members. Can a system of positive incentives, similar to SWPBIS for students, increase staff morale? Can this improve the whole school environment? Will it result in better and more effective behavior management or instructional practices by staff?

With more research, it might be possible for one to understand better the perceptions of staff regarding culture and race. There are several unanswered questions: (a) what characteristics define culture and how might these affect perceptions of students at school, (b) do staff perceive either race or culture as more influential in student behavior, (c) what affect does staff believe race has on their perceptions and their colleagues' perceptions of student behavior and, (d) what steps or actions do staff believe they and their colleagues could take to decrease or eliminate the disproportionate number of African-American students receiving office referrals?

Participants were concerned that colleagues had a missionary ideology or lowered expectations for students at this school. A potential study could compare the opinions of staff at this site to staff with different school demographics. Research could compare their perceptions regarding consequences, justifications for student behavior, and level of expectations for

students. Do staff at high poverty predominantly non-White urban schools tend to have different perceptions of students and views on behavior management than staff at more affluent schools with a less diverse student population? A study comparing the perceptions of staff at two schools with different demographics could also address staff's reactions to parents and home life.

### **Conclusion**

My central research question was, "What are the perceptions and actions of staff regarding behavior management at a high-poverty school that is not meeting state academic standards?" Because there is a relationship between behavior management and student achievement, and because many students regularly misbehave or make severely negative behavior choices, behavior management is an important area for study at this site. I found that the staff are concerned about consistency, helping the students negotiate the cultural differences between school and home, and value positivity. They have not all implemented fully school reform initiatives, due to various factors. They are concerned when one or more students waste instructional time or set a negative example for other students.

Staff were unlikely to speak positively about their own behavior management practices or those of their colleagues, and almost all noted a difference between how they would like to manage student behavior and how they actually do manage behavior. Staff believe that factors such as culture and home life may influence student behavior at school, but that they were ultimately responsible for student behavior. The staff have a strong desire to build caring relationships with students, but this may sometimes get in the way of holding students to high standards.



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Appendix A  
**CONSENT FORM**  
**UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**

Behavior Management Practices and School Workers' Perceptions: What We Believe, How We  
 Act, and Why

IRB Approval Code: 672510-1

I am conducting a study about the behavior management practices of school personnel. I invite you to participate in this research. You were selected as a possible participant because you are employed at Northport Elementary. Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by Kristin Hiykel through the University of St. Thomas. My advisor on this study is Karen Westberg with the School of Education at the University of St. Thomas.

**Purpose and Procedures:**

The purpose of this study is to examine the perceptions and actions of adults regarding student behavior. If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to participate in a one-on-one semi-structured interview.

This study will take about 45 minutes.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risks. You may be asked to describe your perceptions and actions of student behavior, to describe other adults' actions and to share beliefs about classroom management.

There are no direct benefits for participation.

**Confidentiality:**

Records produced will include interview oral recordings, written notes, computer documents, and consent forms. The records of this study will be kept confidential. I will not identify study participants by name in the recordings, written notes, and computer documents. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way. I will not tell those in authority at the school whether or not you participated in this study. Recordings and notes will be stored in my home in my private study. They will be destroyed after 4 years. Computer data will be kept secure in a password protected computer for 4 years. Consent forms will be kept in a separate folder from other data as to not identify interview responses by name. Consent forms will be kept in my home in my private study. Consent forms will be destroyed 3 years after the conclusion of the study.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas, Kristin Hiykel, XXXXXXXX

Elementary, or XXXXXXXXXXXX Schools. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw at any time up to and until you complete the interview. Should you decide to withdraw, your data will not be used. You are also free to skip any questions.

### **Contacts and Questions**

The researcher for this study can be contacted via phone at XXX-XXX-XXXX or email at XXXXXXXX@XXXXXXXXX.edu.

You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact my advisor, Karen Westberg, at XXX-XXX-XXXX. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at XXX-XXX-XXXX with any questions or concerns.

**Upon request, you will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.**

### **Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study. I am at least 18 years of age.

---

**Signature of Study Participant**

---

**Date**

---

**Print Name of Study Participant**

---

**Signature of Researcher**

---

**Date**

## Appendix B

**School-Wide Behavior and Positive Behavior Interventions Survey**

Circle the one response that best represents you.

**1. With what grade levels do you primarily work?**

K-1                      2-3                      4-5                      K-5

**2. What is your role with students?**Classroom teacher      EL Teacher      Title 1 Teacher      Specialist Teacher      Administration  
Aide or Paraprofessional      Special Education Teacher      Food Service Staff      Substitute**3. How many years you have worked in this building?**

0-2                      3-5                      6-10                      Over 10

**4. Please circle the response that best describes your level of School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (SWPBIS) training. (Circle only one.)**

None

Attended training in the building

Attended at least one district training or an outside workshop

Led others in SWPBIS training

**5. During your interactions with students, how disruptive are the following student behaviors in a typical week?***0 is not disruptive at all, 4 is very disruptive.*

(a.) Talking out of turn	0	1	2	3	4
(b.) Getting out of designated spot	0	1	2	3	4
(c.) Student inattention	0	1	2	3	4
(d.) Insubordination (refusal)	0	1	2	3	4
(e.) Verbal arguments	0	1	2	3	4
(f.) Physical aggression/fights	0	1	2	3	4

**6. How important are the following in setting up and maintaining desired student behaviors?***0 is not important at all, 4 is very important*

(a.) Establishing classroom rules and norms	0	1	2	3	4
(b.) Use of positive incentives (SWPBIS)	0	1	2	3	4
(c.) Building relationships between adults and students	0	1	2	3	4
(d.) Consequences for undesired behaviors	0	1	2	3	4
(e.) Creating engaging lessons or environments	0	1	2	3	4

7. Which form of School-Wide Positive Behavior Intervention and Supports do you use most often? (Circle one)

Bear Tickets                      Coins                      Other                      I don't use any

8. How many Bear tickets do you estimate you handed out yesterday? (Circle one)

0                      1-10                      11-20                      Over 20

9. How many Bear tickets do you estimate you handed out last week? (Circle one)

0-5                      6-25                      26-50                      Over 50

10. Why do you give out positive incentives, such as Bear Tickets, coins or other? You may circle more than one.

It is a district initiative.

It helps improve student behavior.

It rewards students who always do the right thing.

It helps students who are struggling

11. Which Bear Student Expectations are you most likely to recognize or reward? Please rank 1-4 the Bear Student Expectations in the order for which you most frequently hand out Bear Tickets: (i.e. 1 for "most likely to recognize", 2 for "second most likely", etc.)

\_\_\_\_\_ Belong  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Empathize  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Achieve  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Respect

12. What is one student behavior that you have rewarded as "Belonging?"

13. What is one student behavior that you have rewarded as "Empathizing?"

14. What is one student behavior that you have rewarded as "Achieving?"

15. What is one student behavior that you have rewarded as "Respect?"

16. Are there any factors that make it difficult to hand out Bear Tickets or coins? Please explain.

17. Do you use any other forms of incentives or School-Wide Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports with Students? Please describe below.

## Appendix C

### Interview Guide

1. What are the student misbehaviors that you must manage in a typical day, and which behaviors are the most disruptive or distract from learning the most?
2. What types of interventions do you use with students? ( i.e. praise, private conferences, tangible rewards, class rewards, punishments, etc.) Why do you use these methods?
3. What do you think about school-wide behavior systems?
4. Do you think teachers spend too much time dealing with behavior? Explain.
5. What effect does a teacher's personality have on classroom management?
6. How often do you think teacher ineffectiveness at classroom management causes student misbehavior?
7. What influences do parents/guardians/home life have over student behavior in school?
8. Is culture a factor in students' misbehavior, or perceived misbehavior?
9. Is there ever a disconnect between your own philosophical belief about classroom management and interventions and what you (are able to) put into practice? Why?
10. How has your behavior management style changed from when you began working with students to now? (If it has changed at all.)
11. What could be done to improve behavior management at this school?

**Please describe how you might respond to the following scenarios:**

Scenario 1: A student is running in the hallway and collides with another student. The second student falls to the floor.

Scenario 2: Students were instructed to complete work at their seats, but you notice that two students are in a disagreement. One child begins to cry and claims the other is using inappropriate language.

Scenario 3: A student refuses to complete any work assigned to them during an instructional time. He or she begins to argue with another student rather than begin work. You give the student another reminder to start work, and he/she leaves the classroom without any explanation.

## **Appendix D of Open and Axial Coding**

I created this to use primarily in the coding stages. The first number refers to the corresponding interview guide question. The second number refers to the participant(s).

### **Ways Staff Talk About Students**

#### **Emotional needs of students.**

- 1: 9, 15
- 2: 9, 12
- 3: 4, 10
- 4: 1, 7
- 5: 1, 10, 15
- 6: 15
- 7: 10
- 8: 5
- 9: 14
- 12.1: 1, 6, 12, 14
- 12.2: 5, 7, 9, 10, 14, 15 (ignoring emotional needs)
- 12.3: 1, 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 10, 11
- 12.4: 15 (too much time spent on it)

#### **One or a few negatively affecting other students' education.**

- 1: 9, 13, 14
- 3: 10
- 4: 1, 11
- 6: 10
- 8: 2
- 9: 2
- 11: 1, 2, 3

#### **Describing a negative behavior without giving a justification.**

- 1: 13
- 4: 2

#### **Students taking advantage.**

- 1: 14
- 5: 9, 14
- 6: 4, 10
- 10: 14

#### **"Kids will be kids."**

- 6: 5
- 2: 12
- 12.4: 1

#### **Counteracting negative things learned at home.**

- 2: 10, 14
- 4: 9

#### **Home life is not only factor in misbehavior .**

- 7: 1, 11, 13, 15,

#### **Negative views of home life**

- 7: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15

**Positive view of home life**

7: 1, 5 (reluctance to judge), 6, 11, 12

**Culture is not a factor in student misbehavior.**

8: 4, 15

**Race**

3: 10

5: 10

8: (culture question) 1, 6, 7 (as non-factor), 11

**Ways Staff Talk About Colleague and Themselves****Ultimate responsibility is with teachers.**

5:3, 5, 15

6:9

7: 4, 6, 9, 13

8: 6

**Perceptions of colleagues.**

3: 6, 11

4: 1, 6

**Criticisms of colleagues.**

1: 14

2: 2, 7, 14

3: 12, 14

4: 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 15

5: 1, 4, 9, 10

6: 1, 2, 7, 8, 10

8: 6, 9, 15

9: 4, 6, 14

10: 14

11: 2, 4, 12

12.2: 10

12.4: 15

**Reluctance to criticize colleagues.**

4:4

6:1, 7

8:6

9:7

11: 2, 7, 8, 9, 13 (or school for some of these)

**Empathy for colleagues.**

3: 6—burnt out

11: 2

12: 5

**Praise for colleagues.**

3: 10

6: 1, 6, 14

10: 5

11: 7, 8

12.4: 11

**Critique of oneself.**

2: 2, 7, 9

4: 5, 9

5: 4, 12

6: 1, 9, 13

9: 1, 9, 12, 13

10: 13

12.3: 1

12.4: 12

**Praise for oneself.**

1: 3,4

3: 14

8: 15

9: 15

10: 10

12.1: 15

12.2: 4

12.3 4, 15

**Strategies Staff Use**

**Proactive.**

1: 13

2: 3, 6, 9, 12, 15

6: 1, 12

9: 6

10: 1, 3, 6, 12, 15

12.3: 1, 4

12.4: 12

**Need to initially spend time to spend less.**

4: 3, 6, 8, 14

**Relationships.**

1: 14

2: 1, 3, 4, 6

3: 9,

5: 6, 8, 9, 10, 14

6: 5,

10: 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 15

11: 9,

12.3, 4, 5, 10

12.4, 12

**Individual needs/differentiation.**

2: 9, 14, 15

3: 15

5: 1, 15

12.1: 1, 9, 14



12.3: 14, 15

12.4: 1, 15

**Code-switching.**

2: 14

7: 3, 4, 5, 9, 15

8: 3, 6, 14, 15

**Consistency.**

1: 6

2: 2 (with oneself)

3: 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 11 (EAs don't have it), 12, 13, 14, 15

4: 5 (with oneself), 6, 8 (with oneself), 14 (with oneself),

5: 1, 2, 7, 9,

6: 1 (with oneself), 8 (not all using tools we've been given),

7: 1

9: 15

10: 15,

11: 1, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 12, 15

12.3: 8,

**Reference to current initiatives.**

2:14 (Hollie)

6: 8 (culturally responsive and arts integration)

8: 1 (NUA), 6, (Hollie and his culturally responsive), 14 (Hollie)

9: 5 (RC), 7 (RC)

10: 6 (RC), 8 (arts integration, cult. responsive), 12 (RC PBIS)

11: 2 (Hollie), 6 (RC),

**How participants talk about positive interventions**

2: 1, 2, 4, 7, 8, 12, 13, 14

3: All participants

5: 13

9: 1, 13

11: 13

12.2: 4

12.4: 12

**Positivity(importance of it).**

2: 1, 2, 4, 9, 12

5: 1, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12, 13, 14

6: 13

9: 12, 13

10: 3, 8

12.4: 3, 12

**Picking battles.**

1: 2, 7, 9

4: 5

**Bringing focus back to academics and instruction.**

4: 13

6: 9

9: 15  
 10: 3, 5, 14  
 11: 3, 9  
 12.2: 5, 11, 13, 14, 15  
 12.3: 5, 15

**Teaching behavior explicitly.**

1: 2  
 2: 4, 12  
 2: 8, 14  
 3: 6  
 4: 6, 9  
 6: 1  
 7: 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 14, 15  
 8: 15,  
 10: 1, 4, 6, 12, 15  
 11: 9, 15  
 12.1: 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13, 15  
 12.2: 1, 8, 11, 12  
 12.3: 1, 5

**Raising voice/changing tone.**

2: 14  
 5: 1, 5, 14  
 9: 10, 12, 13,  
 10: 5, 11, 13,  
 12.3: 6

**Immediacy.**

2:4

**Reentry or fixing mistakes.**

2: 3, 12

**Set up of classroom can cause problems.**

1: 14  
 11: 13

**Justifications For Student Misbehavior**

1: 15  
 2: 10, 12, 14  
 3:9  
 4: 1, 5, 9  
 5: 1, 3, 5, 9, 10, 15  
 6: 1, 5, 9  
 7: 2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 10, 11, 12, 13  
 8: 1, 2, 3, 5, 6, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13  
 9: 14  
 11: 3, 4, 9, 13  
 12.3: 1, 3, 4, 5, 10, 15  
 12.4: 15

## **Miscellaneous Themes**

### **Special concerns of specialists.**

3:1  
 4:1, 2  
 5:1, 2  
 6: 1, 5  
 7:1  
 10:1  
 11:1, 5, 13  
 12.3: 1, 5  
 12.4: 1

### **Critique of school systems and/or procedures.**

2: 1, 2, 14  
 3: 2, 4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 14, 15  
 4: 1, 6, 7, 9, 11  
 5:7  
 6: 7, 9  
 7:2  
 8: 1  
 9: 5 (in general, not this site specifically), 10,  
 11: 6 (in general, not this site specifically)

### **Benefits of schoolwide behavior systems for students.**

3: 3, 6, 7, 8, 9, 13,

### **Benefits of schoolwide behavior systems for adults.**

3: 1, 3, 6, 9

### **Loss of teaching time.**

4: 1, 2, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 15

### **Different view because of their status or situation.**

2:10

### **Believing the best of students.**

2: 3, 12

### **Differences in ages.**

3:7